The Ethics of Rhetoric, Richard M Weaver, Literary Licensing, LLC, 2011, 1258205785, 9781258205782. Weaver's "Ethics of Rhetoric," originally published in 1953, has been called his most important statement on the ethical and cultural role of rhetoric. A strong advocate of cultural conservatism, Weaver (1910-1953) argued strongly for the role of liberal studies in the face of what he saw as the encroachments of modern scientific and technological forces in society. He was particularly opposed to sociology. In rhetoric he drew many of his ideas from Plato, especially his "Phaedrus." As a result, all the main strands of Weaver's thought can be seen in this volume, beginning with his essay on the "Phaedrus" and proceeding through his discussion of evolution in the 1925 Scopes "Monkey Trial." In addition, this book includes studies of Lincoln, Burke, and Milton, and remarks about sociology and some proposals for modern rhetoric. Each essay poses issues still under discussion today.

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Richard M. Weaver, 1910-1963 A Life of the Mind, Fred Douglas Young, 1995, Biography & Autobiography, 217 pages. Young accomplishes this by using Weaver's own writings on scholarship and by discussing his most representative and significant essays and books - Ideas Have Consequences....

Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition Communication from Ancient Times to the Information Age, Theresa Enos, Jan 1, 1996, Language Arts & Disciplines, 803 pages. Includes speech communication, argument and persuasion, semiotics, logic..

Weaver's Ethics of Rhetoric, originally published in 1953, has been called his most important statement on the ethical and cultural role of rhetoric. A strong advocate of cultural conservatism, Weaver (1910-1953) argued strongly for the role of liberal studies in the face of what he saw as the encroachments of modern scientific and technological forces in society. He was particularly opposed to sociology. In rhetoric he drew many of his ideas from Plato, especially his Phaedrus.

As a result, all the main strands of Weaver's thought can be seen in this volume, beginning with his essay on the Phaedrus and proceeding through his discussion of evolution in the 1925 Scopes "Monkey Trial." In addition, this book includes studies of Lincoln, Burke, and Milton, and remarks about sociology and some proposals for modern rhetoric. Each essay poses issues still under discussion today.

Except for the final entry in this masterly collection of essays, "Ultimate Terms in Contemporary Rhetoric," which has been widely reprinted in anthologies, the contributions of Weaver, a late professor of rhetoric at the University of Chicago, are not generally known. Yet at his best, Weaver's essays bear comparison with those of his favorite George Orwell. Like Orwell, Weaver was one of the truest humanists of our age and hence really cannot be accurately described with our labels of left-wing, centrist, or right-wing. Exposing the vicious or stupid to champion the humanly valuable was his forte; having a seemingly unerring sensibility for doing this, Weaver is always able to surprise his readers, forcing them to hold little dialectics with themselves to discover their ultimate beliefs and terms of persuasion. Whether he is restoring to a central place in the educational experience and in political speech the role of Eros, or explaining why Edmund Burke was a liberal but Abraham Lincoln a conservative, Weaver is always both a shock and a joy to read.

Unlike a previous reviewer, I found Weaver's handling of Burke and Lincoln to be even handed. His analysis of their rhetoric cannot be entirely divorced from his own inclinations and I do not fault him for that. Like the first essay on the Phaedrus, Weaver does not accept the role of non-lover in his own rhetoric nor desire it of others.

What Weaver does very well is open our eyes to what ought to be self-evident - that the manner of our argumentation, the style of our attempt to persuade, reveals much about ourselves and the "ethic" of our rhetoric. As such, at least with me, it forces us to re-examine that which indeed we do hold dear and what our objectives truly are. In a world where most people confess principle yet argue from circumstance, knowing the difference between the two enables us to avoid hypocrisy in ourselves and at the same time, understand the filters which govern other's hearing.
Along the way, Weaver's examples, particularly his analysis of the Scope trials, awakens us to how rhetoric can function and how, just perhaps, a reawakening to it in our culture, might immensely elevate the consciousness of our tribes. If the ethics of it were more widely regarded, the great issues of our day might indeed be discussed in a more compelling and enlightening manner.

I read this book a few years ago, after reading Weaver's wonderful "Ideas Have Consequences." I'm not sure what his motivations were for glorifying Lincoln and demonizing Burke. But I found myself reading his examples of Lincoln, which he holds up as examples of "arguing from Genus," and seeing many of the same rhetorical tactics used by Burke that he attacks as "arguing from circumstance." I really think that you have to read these passages with a prejudice towards viewing them the way that Weaver does, in order to reach the same conclusions. If you apply his own reasons for attacking Burke to passages by Lincoln, you'll see that his arguments are not well supported.

Richard Malcolm Weaver, Jr (March 3, 1910 â€“ April 1, 1963) was an American scholar who taught English at the University of Chicago. He is primarily known as an intellectual historian, political philosopher and a shaper of mid-20th century conservatism and as an authority on modern rhetoric. A solitary figure in 20th-century American academic life, briefly a socialist in his youth, a lapsed leftist intellectual conservative by the time he was in graduate school, a teacher of composition, a Platonist philosopher who wrote on the problem of universals and criticized nominalism, a literary and cultural critic, and a theorist of human nature and society. Described by biographer Fred Young (1995: 4) as a "radical and original thinker" remembered for his books Ideas Have Consequences (a recurring phrase in conservative intellectual and political discourse) and The Ethics of Rhetoric, his writings remain influential, particularly among conservative theorists and scholars of the American South. Weaver was also associated with the "New Conservatives," a group of scholars who in the 1940s and 1950s promoted traditionalist conservatism.

Weaver was the eldest of four children born to a middle-class white Southern family in Asheville, North Carolina. His father, Richard Sr., owned a livery stable. Following the death of her husband in 1915, Carolyn Embry Weaver supported her children by working in her family's department store in her native Lexington, Kentucky. Lexington is the home of the University of Kentucky and of two private colleges. Hence Weaver grew up in a community with intellectual and cultural sophistication and educational opportunities.

Despite his family's straitened circumstances following the death of his father, Richard Jr. attended a private boarding school and the University of Kentucky. He earned an A.B in English in 1932. The teacher at Kentucky who most influenced him was Francis Galloway. After a year of graduate study at Kentucky, Weaver began a master's degree in English at Vanderbilt University. John Crowe Ransom supervised his thesis, titled The Revolt against Humanism, a critique of the humanism of Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More. Weaver then taught one year at Auburn University and three years at Texas A&M University.

In 1940, Weaver began a Ph.D. in English at Louisiana State University (LSU), whose faculty included the rhetoricians and critics Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, and the conservative political philosopher Eric Voegelin. While at LSU, Weaver spent summers studying at Harvard University, the University of Virginia, and the Sorbonne. His Ph.D. was awarded in 1943 for a thesis, supervised first by Arlin Turner then by Cleanth Brooks, titled The Confederate South, 1865-1910: A Study in the Survival of a Mind and a Culture. It was published in 1968, posthumously, under the title The Southern Tradition at Bay.

After one year's teaching at North Carolina State University, Weaver joined the English department at the University of Chicago, where he spent the rest of his career (Young 3-4), and where his exceptional teaching earned him that university's Quantrell Award in 1949. In 1957, Weaver wrote the first article in the inaugural issue of Russell Kirk's Modern Age.

Weaver spent his academic summers in a house he purchased in his ancestral Weaverville, North Carolina, very near Asheville. His widowed mother resided there year-round. Weaver traveled
between Chicago and Asheville by train. To connect himself with traditional modes of agrarian life, he insisted that the family vegetable garden in Weaverville be plowed by mule. Every August the Weaver family held a reunion which Richard regularly attended and not infrequently addressed.

Precocious and bookish from a very young age, Weaver grew up to become "one of the most well-educated intellectuals of his era" (Scotchie 4). Highly self-sufficient and independent, he has been described as "solitary and remote" (Young 1), as a "shy little bulldog of a man" (Nash 84). Lacking close friends, and having few lifelong correspondents other than his Vanderbilt teacher and fellow Agrarian Donald Davidson, Weaver was able to focus on his scholarly activities. He reflected long on the moral degradation of human nature.

In 1962, the Young Americans for Freedom gave Weaver an award for "service to education and the philosophy of a free society" (Scotchie x). Shortly before his sudden death in Chicago, Weaver accepted an appointment at Vanderbilt University. According to his tombstone, Dr. Weaver died on April 3, 1963. In 1964, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (Nash 82) created a graduate fellowship in his memory. In 1983, the Rockford Institute established the annual Richard M. Weaver Award for Scholarly Letters.

Influenced by his University of Kentucky professors, who were mostly of Midwestern origin and of social democratic inclinations, and by the crisis of the Great Depression, Weaver believed that industrial capitalism had led the United States to a general moral, economic, and intellectual failure. Initially hoping that socialism would afford an alternative to the prevailing industrialist culture (Young 3), he joined the Kentucky chapter of the American Socialist Party. In 1932 Weaver actively campaigned for Norman Thomas, the standard-bearer of that party. A few years later, he made a financial contribution to the Loyalist cause in the Spanish Civil War. Encounters with intellectuals in coming years would unsettle his early acceptance of socialist dogma.

While doing a master's degree in English at Vanderbilt University, Weaver discovered ideas related to the Southern Agrarians there (Young 69). Gradually he began a rejection of socialism and embrace of tradition. Over the remainder of his life, he arguably became the most eloquent and accomplished exponent that movement has ever had. He admired and sought to emulate its leader, the "doctor of culture" John Crowe Ransom (Young 5).

The Agrarians wrote passionately about the traditional values of community and the Old South. In 1930, a number of Vanderbilt University faculty and their students, led by Ransom, wrote an Agrarian manifesto, titled I'll Take My Stand (Young 38). Weaver agreed with the group's suspicion of the post-Civil War industrialization of the South (Young 47). He found more congenial Agrarianism's focus on traditionalism and regional cultures than socialism's egalitarian "romanticizing" of the welfare state (Scotchie 12). Yet Weaver abandoned socialism for Agrarianism only gradually over a number of years. For example, the thinking of his 1934 M.A. thesis was not Agrarian (Young 58).

The Southern Tradition at Bay, the title under which Weaver's 1943 doctoral dissertation was published in 1968 after his death, surveyed the post-Appomattox literature of the states that were part of the Confederacy. He revealed what he considered its continuities with the ante-bellum era. Weaver also discussed certain Southerners who dissented from this tradition, such as Walter Hines Page, George Washington Cable, and Henry W. Grady, whom he termed "Southern liberals."

Weaver identified four traditional Southern characteristics: "a feudal theory of society, a code of chivalry, the ancient concept of the gentleman, and a noncreedal faith" (Young 78). According to him, the Southern feudal system was centered on the legitimate pride a family line derived from linking its name to a piece of land (Young 81). For Weaver, land ownership gave the individual a much needed "stability, responsibility, dignity, and sentiment" (Scotchie 25).

Yet in his Ideas Have Consequences, he downplayed the materialistic notion of ownership. He asserted that private property was "the last metaphysical right" of the individual (Nash 100). Southern chivalry and gentlemen's behavior, on the other hand, emphasized a paternalistic personal
honor, and decorum over competition and cleverness (Young 83). Weaver claimed that women preferred the romanticized soldier to the materialistic businessman (Scotchie 36).

The noncreedal faith Weaver advocated grew out of what he termed the South's "older religiousness" (Young 84). This "religion" focused on a respect for tradition and nature, and for the Anglican/Episcopal church (Young 84-85), the established church in Virginia and south during the colonial era. Weaver agreed with the traditional Christian notion that external science and technology could not save man, born a sinner in need of redemption (Scotchie 21). Although he was a non-practicing Protestant, he showed admiration for religious tradition through his reverence for the written word as a grounding force in a morally unstable society (Young 86).

Weaver claimed that the South was the "last non-materialist civilization in the Western World" (Scotchie 17). Weaver came to advocate a revival of Southern traditions as the only cure for a commodity-based capitalism. He believed it was a way to combat the social degradation he witnessed while living in Chicago.

Ironically, Weaver's ancestral region, Asheville, North Carolina, was not typical of the American South whose virtues he came to revere and extol. It is instead part of the Appalachian upland, settled mainly by persons of Scots-Irish ancestry and evangelical Presbyterian affiliation. Slavery was almost unknown there, because the soil and climate were not suited to cotton or any other plantation agriculture. Instead, the main economic activity was subsistence farming on small freeholds, with many families living in serious poverty. North Carolina's decision to secede from the Union in 1861 was far from unanimous, and many Appalachian men refused to fight for the Confederacy during the Civil War. The westernmost Congressional district of North Carolina, which includes Asheville, has mostly voted Republican since the Civil War.

Weaver gradually came to see himself as the "cultural doctor of the South," despite making his career in Chicago (Young 5). More specifically, he sought to resist what he saw as America's growing barbarism by teaching his students of the correct way to write, use, and understand language, teaching that connected Weaver with Platonist ideals. Following the tradition of the Socratic dialogues, Weaver taught that misuse of language led to social corruption. That belief led him to criticize jazz as a medium that promoted "barbaric impulses" because he perceived it as lacking form and rules (Scotchie 46).

Weaver's study of American literature focused on the past, such as the nineteenth century culture of New England and the South, and the Lincoln-Douglas debates (Young 6). Attempting to truly understand language, Weaver concentrated on a culture's fundamental beliefs; that is, beliefs that strengthened and educated citizens into a course of action (Young 9). By teaching and studying language, he endeavored to generate a healthier culture that would no longer use language as a tool of lies and persuasion in a "prostitution of words" (Young 9). Moreover, in a capitalist society, applied science was the "sterile opposite" of what he saw as redemption â€“ the "poetic and ethical vision of life" (Young 62).

Weaver condemned modern media and modern journalism as tools for exploiting the passive viewer. Convinced that ideas, not machines, compelled humanity towards a better future, he gave words precedence over technology (Nash 96). Influenced by the Agrarians' focus on poetry, he turned to poetic writing as a means of exorcising humanity (Young 76). In a civilized society, poetry allowed one to express personal beliefs that science and technology could not overrule. In Weaver's words, "We can will our world" (Nash 97). That is, human beings â€“ not mechanical or social forces â€“ can make positive decisions through language that will change their existence.

In a short speech delivered to the 1950 reunion of the Weaver clan, Weaver criticized urban life in Chicago as follows: "the more closely people are crowded together, the less they know one another" (Address 114). In a comparative study of Randolph of Roanoke and Thoreau, Weaver defined "individualism" in two ways: 1) "studied withdrawal from society" (i.e. Thoreau) and 2) "political action at the social level" (i.e. Randolph) (Young 11). Thoreau (according to Weaver) rejected society while Randolph embraced social bonds through politics.
Personally opposed to America's centralized political power, Weaver, like Randolph, preferred an individualism that included community (Young 12). "Community" here refers to a shared identity of values tied to a geographical and spatial location â€“ in Weaver's case, the Old South. He concluded that individualism that is founded on community enabled a citizen "to know who he was and what he was about" (Young 12). Without this intimate foundation, citizens seeking individualism would be unable to reach a true, personal identity. More importantly, he believed that humans should grant priority to a living community and its well-being, not to individual fulfillment. (Scotchie 3).

In Ideas Have Consequences, Weaver analyzed William of Occam's 14th century notions of nominalistic philosophy. In broad terms, nominalism is the idea that "universals are not real, only particulars" (Young 107). Nominalism deprives people of a measure of universal truth, so that each man becomes his own "priest and ethics professor" (Scotchie 5). Weaver deplored this relativism, and believed that modern men were "moral idiots, ... incapable of distinguishing between better and worse" (Nash 89).