Abstract
Kenneth Burke's pentad has been widely applied by rhetorical critics, though its ontological status has not been recognized. This essay argues that Burke conceives of the pentad as a universal heuristic of motives which derives from the very conception of human action. It demonstrates how the terms of the pentad may be exploited by rhetors and analyzed by rhetorical critics, explaining how the grammar of motives underlies the rhetoric of motives.

Introduction
No rhetorical concept in Kenneth Burke's formidable corpus is used more frequently by rhetorical critics and yet misunderstood more widely than the pentad and pentadic ratios. One only needs to survey the mounting collection of pentadic analyses over the past quarter century to establish the frequency of critical usage (Ling; Fisher; Brown; Huyink; Brummett; Blankenship, Fine, and Davis; Peterson, "Will to Conservation"; Birdsell; Kelley; Peterson, "Meek" and "Rhetorical Construction"; Rountree, "Judicial Invention" and "Quintus"; Tonn, Endress, and Diamond; Rountree "Spurgeon"), while bemoaning the divergence between Burke himself and several "Burkeians" over the issue of dramatism's (and the pentad's) essential nature (see Burke et al.; Brock; Burke, "Dramatism and Logology"; Lentricchia, 68-69). Fortunately for rhetorical critics, agreement over the issue of the pentad's status has rarely prevented fruitful analyses of rhetorical acts and artifacts. Nonetheless, a clear exposition of Burke's theory of dramatism and the purposes for which he developed the pentad as a critical tool may help rhetorical critics who wish to apply this powerful rubric to an understanding of the rhetoric of human motives. Such is the purpose of this essay.

Burke's Pentad as a Universal Heuristic of Motives
Burke's seminal 1945 work, A Grammar of Motives, opens with a question which the book seeks to answer: "What is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?" (xv). Burke's answer to this question turns on the fundamental distinction that humans make between the motion of objects and the action of humans, investigating the implications of our habit of attributing motives to humans. Notice that the philosophical issue of whether humans really do act (rather than merely move as a bag full of chemicals or genetic programming or neuronal circuits might "move") is not Burke's concern, but only the recognition that we do, indeed, "pragmatically" treat other human beings as if they were acting rather than merely moving (Burke, Language 53). Burke illustrates this distinction:

[A] physical scientist's relation to the materials involved in the study of motion differs in quality from his relation to his colleagues. He would never think of "petitioning" the objects of his experiment or "arguing with them," as he would with persons whom he asks to collaborate with him or to judge the results of his experiment. Implicit in these two relations is the distinction between the sheer motion of things and the actions of persons. ("Dramatism" 11)

But what is involved in viewing, talking about, and treating others as humans engaged in action rather than as bodies in mere motion? An answer to this question, Burke insists, requires a philosophical analysis of the concept and term "action" (Grammar xxiii). For any species of human action to be considered "action" at all, Burke finds, requires (1) an act undertaken by an agent, (2) within some scene or context, (3) through some agency, (4) for some purpose (Grammar xv). Although these five terms--Burke's dramatistic pentad--appear to be positive, they are actually a heuristic of motives, asking of any action: "what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)" (Grammar xv; Conversations 53). In a later edition of his Grammar, Burke distinguished "attitude" as a specific form of "incipient" action, which asks the "how" question as "in what manner?" (Grammar 443). (Although the addition of this term technically makes the pentad into a hexad, I will continue to use the more common term "pentad" in referring to the collection of terms that constitutes Burke's heuristic of motives.)

Burke does not claim any originality for his pentad, finding the same heuristic in works from Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics to Talcott Parsons's Structure of Social Action, and noting that it was "fixed in the medieval questions ruis (agent), quid (act), ubi (scene defined as place), quibus auxillis (agency), cur (purpose), quo modo (manner, 'attitude'), quando (scene defined temporally)" ("Dramatism" 9). Given the universality of the pentadic terms, Burke asserts, "all statements that assign motives can be shown to arise out of them and to terminate in them" (Grammar xi), and any complete statement of motives will provide answers to all of the questions Grammar xv). However, an answer to one of the pentadic questions will have implications for our interpretation of answers to all of the other pentadic questions. This is because the terms of the pentad share "certain formal interrelationships...by reason of their role as attributes of a common ground or substance" (Burke, Grammar xix). Because each of these elements is interconnected in the structure of action, in what Burke calls the "grammar of motives," our understanding of one term necessarily is tied to our understanding of all of the other terms. Thus, whenever we perceive a scene, agent, act, agency, purpose, or attitude as having a given nature or quality, we accept another's characterization of one of those pentadic elements, we "grammatically" limit potential interpretations of all the other terms.

We see most clearly the connection between terms of the pentad when we take them in pairs or ratios, analyzing thoroughly the implications within particular grammatical relations. The rhetorical power of such grammatical limitations is illustrated in Burke's observation that one's characterization of a given situation,"prescribes the range of acts that will seem reasonable, implicit, or necessary in that situation" ("Dramatism" 14). Thus, the movie-goer who screams "Fire!"--a scenic description--implicitly recommends the act of quickly exiting the theater. That is not to say that a fire alert will send everyone scurrying. One's characterization of a room as "ablaze" is
This study of Reagan as scene also illustrates another point about pentadic analysis: Although, strictly speaking, pentadic analysis is not deterministic in dictating the "reasonable" act of fleeing. However, such characterizations are terministic in suggesting how such actions are to be interpreted.

Burke admits that we can and do resist the terministic constraints of grammatical relations, employing what he calls the "nevertheless" strategy (Personal Interview). For example, the movie-goer may state: "Yes, I believe there is a fire in the theater; I believe that if I stay I may be injured or killed; and I believe I can escape now with little or no injury. Nevertheless, I shall stay." Barring some other information concerning the movie-goer's motives, this "strategy" would leave us to interpret his or her decision as foolish or insane. Thus, relations among grammatical terms function as rhetorical constraints that do not dictate action, but shape the interpretation of action. By extension, these constraints function when one attempts to account for any sort of action, whether undertaken by one's self or another.

Just how a given term shapes other terms depends upon their terministic relationships. Those relationships have general and specific dimensions. General dimensions are described and amply illustrated by Burke in his Grammar of Motives: The scene "contains" the act; means (agencies) are adapted to ends (purposes); agents are the "authors" of their actions; and so forth. Differences among cultures, theories of metaphysics or ontology, and philosophies of action may lead to correspondingly different types of understandings of these general dimensions and the relationships between agents and actions, means and ends, and so forth. For example, the Western emphasis on pragmatic, means-ends understanding of "proper" motives may be less prevalent in the East. Nonetheless, all cultures will make general assumptions about how agents are related to their actions, how scenes shape actions, to what extent ends ought to determine means, and the like.

Specific dimensions of terministic relations are normative, established by a discourse community's shared beliefs about "what goes with what" at a given point in time, underlying expectations that one will or should find certain types of agents engaging in certain types of actions, using certain agencies, within certain scenes, for certain purposes, evincing certain attitudes. For example, we might expect to find certain sorts of men drinking, smoking, cat-calling, and stuffing dollar bills into the g-strings of female strippers on a Saturday night. Character types in popular culture rely on such stereotypical relations, encouraging us to make such terministic connections (and applying terministic screens) in sizing up agents. Rhetors may take advantage of such expected relations by invoking them or by allowing an audience to participate in its own persuasion by inferring them. On the other hand, such expected relations create rhetorical constraints for those who would sever presumptive ties between particular scenes and particular acts, particular agents and particular agencies, and so forth. Thus, the man who admits: "Yes, I was drinking, smoking, cat-calling, and stuffing dollar bills into the g-strings of female strippers on a Saturday night," would have a difficult time convincing others he is a "feminist."

The rhetor characterizing action has the greatest inventional freedom when no qualities attach to any terms connected to an act, so that no terministic constraints are operative. However, most actions that are the subject of rhetorical exchange already are tainted by some substantive characterization carrying grammatical implications. Even a statement as generic as "someone did something" indicates individual action and locates it in the past, limiting possibilities for interpreting that action. To name an agent, to describe a scene, to state the act, as Kennedy staggered away in a daze).

Rhetorical Analysis Using the Pentad

Pentadic analysis allows the rhetorical critic to reveal how a discursive text works within the grammar of motives to effectively represent motives for rhetorical purposes. Generally, the strategic representation of motives involves two rhetorical functions: (1) directing the attention and (2) both characterizing pentadic terms and terministic relationships. David Ling's early analysis of Senator Edward Kennedy's speech on Chappaquiddick illustrates these functions: Faced with the act of leaving the scene of an accident that killed Mary Jo Kopechne, Kennedy directed attention to a scene of a narrow, unlighted bridge over cold, dark, rushing water that left him nearly drowned and not thinking straight. That terministic focus attempted to draw attention away from alternative terms, such as agent (Kennedy as irresponsible), agency (driving under the influence), attitude (careless), and so forth. It also sought to characterize a terministic relationship (clearly implying that the scene controlled the act, as Kennedy staggered away in a daze).

Critics analyzing terministic emphases in particular representations of motives will find that references to scenes, agents, acts, agencies, purposes, and attitudes take a huge variety of forms. Burke illustrates these possibilities with the term "scene":

Besides general synonyms for scene that are obviously of a background character, such as "society," or "environment," we often encounter quite specific localizations, words for particular places, situations, or eras. "It is 12:20 P.M." is a "scenic" statement. Milton's L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are formed about a scenic contrast between morning and night, with a corresponding contrast of actions. Terms for historical epochs, cultural movements, social institutions (such as "Elizabethan period," "romanticism," "capitalism") are scenic, though often with an admixture of properties overlapping upon the areas covered by the term, agent. If we recall that "ideas" are a property of agents, we can detect this strategic overlap in Locke's expression, "The scene of ideas," the form of which Carl Becker exactly reproduces when referring to "climates of opinion," in The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers. (Grammar 12)

The rhetorical critic must take care to look not simply for terms that are "scenic" (or "purposive" or "agency-related," etc.) on their face, but for those that function within a particular grammar of motives as "scene" (or "purpose" or "agency," etc.). As Burke emphasizes, there is a great deal of overlap between his pentadic terms and pentadic analyses should reveal "the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise" (Grammar xviii; emphasis in original). So, for example, as Blankenship and her colleagues have shown, Ronald Reagan functioned not as agent, but as scene in the 1980 Republican primary debates.

This study of Reagan as scene also illustrates another point about pentadic analysis: Although, strictly speaking, pentadic analysis is
involved when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it.”

Applying this universal heuristic to the vast body of texts about motives should help critics tease out “what is actions of others, even if those ‘others’ and their acts are only proposed, possible, hypothetical, imagined, or generalized” (Rountree, examine what he, she, or others say about his, her, or their own past, present, and future actions, or the past, present, and future scientific works, in news and in bits of gossip offered at random” (Rountree, evidences everywhere: “in systematically elaborated metaphysical structures, in legal judgments, in poetry and fiction, in political and Since the grammar of motives operates in any perception of, interpretation of, or statement about motives, its operation may be clear line between Burke's theory and those, like Erving Goffman's, which rely upon drama as a metaphor. From Goffman's perspective, growing out of the very concept of action recognized by writers on human motives for over two millennia. This ontological point draws a...
References


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