

The production of emotions in political discourse: the rhetorical techniques of Bush and Obama*

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AS IS GENERALLY KNOWN, according to Aristotle a public speech must show *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* in order to persuade. On the other hand, however, Aristotle opposes sophists and other manipulators who persuade their public using cheap effects alone. In the modern period this has been turned into an opposition between rational-factual and emotion-free speech vs. emotional speech characterized by *pathos*. This is not only objectively wrong, since it implies or presupposes that there is such a thing as speech *without* emotions, but also historically: Aristotle is not concerned with two mutually exclusive styles of speaking, but with the fact that *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* are expressed in the appropriate and “optimum” way for the particular speaking situation.¹ And if a certain speech does not achieve this “just synthesis”, then it is too logical, too moral or too passionate. From this it follows, however, that in the following analysis of the rhetorical techniques of Bush and Obama I will not just examine the *pathos*, but deal *in extenso* with the *logos* (i.e. the argumentation and ideological content, but including language aspects as well) and ethical-moral ideas.

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¹ I showed in Eggs (2005) that there is proof of the existence of this principle of optimum choice throughout the entire history of rhetoric.

George W. Bush: the savior strategy

*Fear and confidence: imminent impending evil
vs. courageous attack of the good*

On the level of emotions, the savior strategy consists of a dual and complementary movement: on one hand the existence of an imminent impending evil must be proved and vividly demonstrated; on the other hand the speaker has to show that he is in a position to eliminate this evil. The former aspect involves the emotion or affect of fear, and the latter that of confidence. The greater the evil is shown to be, the greater the recognition for the person who eliminates this evil.

From this point of view, Bush's justification of the Iraq War appears virtually a literal rendition of what Aristotle has to say concerning fear and confidence:

Fear may be defined as a pain or disturbance due to a mental picture of some destructive or painful evil in the future [...] And even these only if they appear not remote but so near as to be imminent [...] From this definition it will follow that fear is caused by whatever we feel has great power of destroying or of harming us in ways that tend to cause us great pain. Hence the very indications of such things are terrible, making us feel that the terrible thing itself is close at hand; the approach of what is terrible is just what we mean by "danger." Such indications are the enmity and anger of people who have power to do something to us; for it is plain that they have the will to do it, and so they are on the point of doing it. Also injustice in possession of power; for it is the unjust man's will to do evil that makes him unjust (Aristotle, 1954:II:5:1382a:21).

Confidence is, of course, the opposite of fear,

[...] it is, therefore, the expectation associated with a mental picture of the nearness of what keeps us safe and the absence or remoteness of what is terrible: it may be due either to the near presence of what inspires confidence or to the absence of what causes alarm. We feel it if we can take steps—many, or important, or both—to cure or prevent trouble [...] We also feel confident [...] if we believe ourselves superior to our rivals in the number

and importance of the advantages that make men formidable wealth, physical strength, strong bodies of supporters, extensive territory, and the possession of all, or the most important, appliances of war (Aristotle, 1954: II:5:1383a:17-b2).

The central item of evidence for the Iraq War was Iraq's possession of weapons of mass murder which Saddam the "villain" or "bad guy" wished to use—according to the Bush Administration—not only against his own people but also against the free world, and in particular against the U.S. This idea is found in Bush's declaration of war of March 19, 2003—officially known as the *Operation Iraqi Freedom Address to the Nation*:

The people of the United States and our friends and allies will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder. We will meet that threat now, with our Army, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines, so that we do not have to meet it later with armies of fire fighters and police and doctors on the streets of our cities [<http://bit.ly/mJgmKJ>].

That the danger should appear "not remote but near" is evoked here by the allusion to the American trauma of 9/11, where the *evil* showed its satanic face "on the streets of American cities", a *threat* which can be eradicated once and for all with a just war. The *confidence* arises from the very fact that the U.S. is "in the possession of the most important appliances of war" (*our Army, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines*).

It is certainly not surprising that we find in the "War and Freedom Address" the focus on an individual person as emphasized by Aristotle, an *outlaw* as we have seen, in whom *evil* is personified and thus becomes concrete and tangible:

In this conflict, America faces an enemy who has no regard for conventions of war or rules of morality. Saddam Hussein has placed Iraqi troops and equipment in civilian areas, attempting to use innocent men, women and children as shields for his own military a final atrocity against his people.

Both techniques of arousing fear—the proof of the possession of dangerous weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the satanization of Saddam (Gunn,

2004)— can be found in a whole host of pronouncements made by Bush, the Bush Administration and those mass media close to Bush, to an increasing extent from early 2002 onward. To illustrate this, here is an example from a radio address delivered by Bush in October 2002:

The danger to America from the Iraqi regime is grave and growing [...] (1) Iraq has stockpiled biological and chemical weapons, and is rebuilding the facilities used to make more of those weapons. (2) Saddam Hussein has used these weapons of death against innocent Iraqi people, and we have every reason to believe he will use them again. (3) Iraq has longstanding ties to terrorist groups, which are capable of and willing to deliver weapons of mass death. (4) And Iraq is ruled by perhaps the world's most brutal dictator who has already committed genocide with chemical weapons, ordered the torture of children, and instituted the systematic rape of the wives and daughters of his political opponents [<http://bit.ly/llbVVt>] (my numbering).

In this speech, Bush states as additional reasons for the *grave and growing danger* the fact that Saddam has used biological and chemical weapons against his own people (= (2)) and that he has *longstanding ties* to terrorists (= (3)). This allows us to distinguish four *concerns* or argument strands which are all intended to arouse fear and to legitimize the war against Iraq:

1. Weapons of mass destruction.
2. The criminal treatment of the Iraqi people.
3. Support for terrorism (axis of evil).
4. Saddam is the world's most brutal dictator.

The “longstanding ties to terrorist groups”, argument strand (3), are a reference to the axis of evil, which includes not only Iraq but also North Korea and Iran. According to Bush in his *State of the Union Address* on 29 January 2002:

Our second goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction. Some of these regimes have been pretty quiet since September the 11th. But we know their true nature.

North Korea is a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens.

Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom.

Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens –leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children. This is a regime that agreed to international inspections –then kicked out the inspectors. This is a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world.

States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger (Bush, 2002).

I have put the beginning and the end of this quotation in italics, because they express the real, essential motivation for Bush's thinking and his actions. His view of history is divisive and Manichean: history is determined by a struggle between good and evil, and this evil exists in our world in the form of an axis of evil consisting primarily of North Korea, Iran and Iraq. This axis of evil is becoming increasingly threatening, because it is trying to get hold of more and more WMD which it –together with its *terrorist allies*– is prepared to use against the good guys, i.e. the U.S. and its allies. As the assertion of a link between Saddam and international terrorism, here made explicitly, was increasingly abandoned in the course of 2002, it is not surprising that it is absent in the declaration of war on March 19, 2003. However, this does not mean that this link was not presupposed as being factually existent. Thus at the beginning of the speech cited, delivered in January 2002, the issue is not that the regimes of the axis of evil sponsor terrorists but rather how these regimes can be prevented from threatening the U.S. and its allies with weapon of mass destruction.

One typical aspect of Bush's rhetoric is the justification of this assertion: *some of these regimes have been pretty quiet since September the 11th. But we know their true nature.* This is a populist *ex silentio* argument that is based on the silence of the adversary, and with this argument Bush attempts to prove that some of the regimes were “somehow” involved in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. This is followed by a further populist procedure: the *argument of*

tacit agreement which ensures that any protest or objection on the part of these regimes would be to no avail, since *We* (i.e. Bush and his public) *know their true nature*.²

What is noticeable is that in both addresses we have quoted it is aspect (3) which has become the central argument. In the *State of the Union Address* the other three concerns are mentioned, but these are not used as the main argument, which is the threat posed by WMD: the axis of evil is not in itself dangerous, but rather as a result of the fact that the countries that make up the axis of evil have WMD at their disposal. Equally, in the *Operation Iraqi Freedom Address* the dictator Saddam is not in himself dangerous: he only becomes dangerous due to the fact that he possesses WMD, or more precisely because he *could* possess weapon of mass destruction.

The Bush Doctrine: bureaucratic vs. populist rhetoric

It is precisely this focus on WMD which is stressed by Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz in an interview in May 2003 with *Vanity Fair*:

For bureaucratic reasons we settled on one issue, weapons of mass destruction, because it was the one reason everyone could agree on.

This wording, which could of course imply that the other reasons, in particular the link between Saddam and international terror, were only a pretext, resulted in a vigorous public debate.³ Wolfowitz –who apart from (1) WMD only mentioned the two reasons (2) criminal treatment of the Iraqi people and (3) support for terrorism– went on to specify what he meant in an interview with the *Washington Post*:

² Cf. the description of this argument by Catalina González: “[...] the knowledge of the hidden premise must be one in which both the orator and the listener partake, although not consciously or reflectively [...] There is in this phenomenon a tacit agreement between the orator and the listener on the basis of a common belief, upon which the listener has never reflected before, but which lies in the realm of his pre-reflective knowledge. The beauty of the whole argument is, then, sustained by a positive feeling of self-appraisal and participation in a common way of feeling and believing” (González, 2006:82).

³ Cf. “What Wolfowitz Really Said” [<http://bit.ly/jlaU05>].

The truth is, we've always had all three of those reasons, and in fact, if you look at Powell's presentation, there have always been all three. There has been a tendency to emphasize the weapons of mass destruction issue. But, as I said in the fuller quote, the real thing that has concerned the President from the beginning and which I think is even the "axis" that's referred to in the "axis of evil" is the connection between terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. So in a way, that's always been the main thing. But if you look at where the intelligence community tends to go, the issue about weapons of mass destruction has never been in controversy [<http://1.usa.gov/m03Zrz>].

What is empirically verifiable is certainly the fact that Bush in his public statements—in spite of the lack of evidence—always assumed that there was a link between Saddam and international terrorism, which one must certainly interpret as proof of the traumatic impact 9/11 had on him. It is also apparent in this context that Wolfowitz does not mention point (4) (Saddam is the world's most brutal dictator), the point which is equally important to Bush. This absence of all *ad personam* aspects in Wolfowitz's rhetoric can be traced back to his *bureaucratic rhetoric*, which in spite of overlap in terms of policy with Bush is a complete contrast to Bush's *populist rhetoric*. For Bush the evil is not abstract, but is always concretely tied to individual people; political structures in general and geopolitical structures in particular are not in themselves threatening, it is only individual people who have embodied evil and it is only these individuals who frighten us and terrorize us.⁴ That is why the danger emanates from the brutal dictator Saddam, who is not just an outlaw and immoral but who above all causes *physical pain* to people, by raping them, torturing them and causing them physical agony with biological and chemical weapons; and 9/11 is not just a terrible event which happened to the U.S., but is a crime committed by people, by *terrorists*, who have caused agonizing pain to flesh-and-blood Americans. Wolfowitz, by contrast, does not speak of terrorists but of *terrorism*; he does not speak of Saddam the criminal, but of *criminal treatment* proceeding from the *Iraqi regime*.

⁴ Eubanks & Schaeffer (2004:54ff.) fail to see this aspect of personification, which is central for Bush, since they apply metonymic relations only between *fear*, *terror*, *threat* and so on. Another problematic aspect is their failure to take into account the fact that fear is a "mental picture of some destructive or painful evil in the future".

Thus the two rhetorics are ultimately based on diametrically opposed views of history which can be reduced to a simple formula: for Bush history is made by individuals, for Wolfowitz it is constellations of geopolitical power, which have to be stabilized and developed by an enlightened political elite in the interests of the U.S., which determine the course of history. This leads to a different *rhetorical theory of persuasion*, a fact not reflected upon either by Bush or Wolfowitz. For Bush *pathos* and above all *ethos* (whose effect has to be reinforced by *logos*) are the central focus, for Wolfowitz it is *logos* alone which persuades: it consists primarily in the rational recognition and explanation of geopolitical relationships of cause and effect and the strategic measures that are to be derived from them. That is why the uncontroversial reason that the Iraqi regime is in possession of WMD is in itself sufficient for Wolfowitz to legitimize a war against this country. This rational *logos* argumentation may have convinced the *United Nations Security Council* in February 2003, in particular because it was put forward by Colin Powell arguing factually (who was of course relying on false or falsely interpreted facts), but it did not convince American citizens –nor Bush himself. People are only convinced if *ethos* and *pathos* are appropriately appealed to. As regards *pathos*, here again is the quotation concerning the central decisive elements of fear for Aristotle:

Fear may be defined as a pain or disturbance due to a mental picture of some destructive or painful evil in the future. And even these only if they appear not remote but so near as to be imminent. Also injustice in possession of power; for it is the unjust man's will to do evil that makes him unjust.

This is precisely what Bush's *populist rhetoric* has achieved. Bush has made an appropriate appeal to *ethos* in two ways: the first is by stylizing Saddam as the incarnation of *bad ethos*; secondly, by presenting himself as *President* and *Leader* with a *decent ethos*. Here, too, Bush's Manichaeic view of history finds its expression. I use the word "leader" deliberately, because Bush's *ethos* must also be described as populist. Bush may be *commander-in-chief* in formal terms, but in terms of rhetoric he behaves like a captain who on one hand meets his soldiers eye to eye, on the same level in other words, but on the other hand cannot and may not allow any criticism of his decisions.⁵ He is

⁵ A symptomatic expression of this *ethos* is the answer Bush gave to a question put by Bob Woodward as to whether he always explains his intentions to Rice and the other cabinet

a *regular guy* like you and me, and he is the *captain who leads us* to victory and to prosperity: he is the regular guy who demands discipline and does not tolerate any criticism.⁶

I am not saying that in the *logos*, i.e. in the geopolitical analysis of the facts, there is a difference or discrepancy between Bush and Wolfowitz. Wolfowitz belongs to a group of neoconservative intellectuals who are strongly influenced by the writings and the teachings of Leo Strauss in Chicago.⁷ This group was to gain increasing influence with the setting up of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) (1997-2006). Their statement of principles, published in June 1997, which Wolfowitz signed, concludes from the fact “the United States stands as the world’s preeminent power” that the U.S. has a claim to global leadership. The essential aspects are:

[...] a military that is strong and ready to meet both present and future challenges; a foreign policy that boldly and purposefully promotes American principles abroad; and national leadership that accepts the United States’ global responsibilities [...] America has a vital role in maintaining peace and security in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. If we shirk our responsibilities, we invite challenges to our fundamental interests. The history of the 20th century should have taught us that it is important to shape circumstances before crises emerge, and to meet threats before they become dire. The history of this century should have taught us to embrace the cause of American leadership [<http://bit.ly/kJrveA>].⁸

members: “Of course not. I’m the commander –see, I don’t need to explain why I say things. That’s the interesting thing about being the president. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don’t feel like I owe anybody an explanation” (Woodward, 2002:145-146; cf. also *Washington Post*, November 19, 2002).

⁶ To that extent he can be compared in many respects with Capt. Miller in the Stephen Spielberg movie *Saving Private Ryan* (1998).

⁷ Irving Kristol is considered to be the founding father; his most important representatives are his son William Kristol and Robert Kagan. Presidents Teddy Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan are considered to be forerunners. Bush’s foreign policy apparatus is staffed with neoconservatives: the Vice-President Cheney, the National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, the head in the Department of Defence Donald Rumsfeld and his assistant Paul Wolfowitz, and their adviser Richard Perle; of the National Security Agency you have the West Asia specialist Elliot Abram.

⁸ Cf. also the Report of *The Project for the New American Century* from September 2000, “Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources For a New Century”

The *Doctrine of preemptive war* already indicated here, abbreviated to the *Bush Doctrine*,⁹ was set out explicitly on September 20, 2002 by Bush's *National Security Council*:

[<http://bit.ly/m6Faua>]. The Christian Science Monitor put the basic neoconservative principles in a nutshell: Neoconservatives “Want the US to be the world’s unchallenged superpower / Share unwavering support for Israel / Support American unilateral action / Support preemptive strikes to remove perceived threats to US security / Promote the development of an American empire / Equate American power with the potential for world peace / Seek to democratize the Arab world / Push regime change in states deemed threats to the US or its allies” [<http://bit.ly/INfD5k>].

⁹ Cf. for the evolution of the Bush Doctrine [<http://to.pbs.org/isnNOD>]. The dominant opinion is that George W. Bush’s foreign policy represents a radical break with American history. Mackubin T. Owens (2009:28) takes the opposite view: “Far from representing a ‘neo-conservative’ innovation in American foreign policy, the Bush Doctrine is in the tradition of the Founders and statesmen of the Early Republic, as well as Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Ronald Reagan. The Bush Doctrine represents a continuation of a policy that fuses American security and the ‘American Mission’. The ‘ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world’ has been a cornerstone of American foreign policy since the earliest days of the Republic”. The historical origin is also the subject of controversial discussion. Ryn (2003:385-386) sees this policy as neo-Jacobin ideology: “The most conspicuous and salient feature of the neo-Jacobin approach to international affairs is its universalistic and monopolistic claims [...] The new Jacobins typically use ‘democracy’ as an umbrella term for the kind of political regime that they would like to see installed all over the world. In their view, only democracy, as they define it, answers to a universal moral imperative and is legitimate”. Clark (2004:34) too does not deny that the “the Manichean dualism of good and evil, the self-described monopoly on virtue, the missionary zeal, and the unilateral foreign policy” could be described as a New Jacobinism, he emphasizes however “that analysis, although illuminating, neglects the indebtedness of this value system to an evangelical Christian fundamentalism –i.e. in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries– that has powerful antecedents in America and was implicit in the Revolution itself. As President George W. Bush explained in an interview in 2002, his values were ‘God-given values. These aren’t United States-created values’”. According to Walter A. McDougall (2004:11) finally the thirteen colonies, which split from England in the eighteenth century, embraced the *spirits* of the English colonists “born of economics, religion and politics, strategy, and legal philosophy far from rejecting the spirits of English expansion [they] actually embraced and expressed them even more fervently than the English themselves”. Since these spirits also dominated the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they still form the American national identity: “So, who are we, we Americans? We’re a priesthood of all believers in a civil religion that combines, often uneasily, the universals preached by Christian evangelism and the universals posited by the Enlightenment –a civil religion that blesses all sects but stands above them in the manner of a grand Freemason lodge. We’re master builders pledged to complete the unfinished pyramid under the All-Seeing Eye of Providence

It is an enduring American principle that this duty obligates the government to anticipate and counter threats, using all elements of national power, before the threats can do grave damage [...] To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively in exercising our inherent right of self-defense [<http://bit.ly/iVteGv>].

Bush himself, on the other hand—which is not surprising—formulates “his” doctrine more ethically—and with passion. In his *Second Inaugural Address* dated January 20, 2005 he says namely:

From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth [...] it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world [...] My most solemn duty is to protect this nation and its people from further attacks and emerging threats. Some have unwisely chosen to test America’s resolve, and have found it firm. We will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler and every nation: The moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right. America will not pretend that jailed dissidents prefer their chains, or that women welcome humiliation and servitude, or that any human being aspires to live at the mercy of bullies [...] America, in this young century, proclaims liberty throughout all the world, and to all the inhabitants thereof. Renewed in our strength—tested, but not weary—we are ready for the greatest achievements in the history of freedom. May God bless you, and may He watch over the United States of America (Bush, 2005).

The genre of *Inaugural Address*, which contains essential features of epideictic discourse, requires of the speaker that he address the major concerns of the nation. Bush personifies these (*the United States, America, the United States of America*), and he assigns to them will and intention (*America will*

that appears on our Great Seal and one-dollar bill. We’re revolutionaries devoted to creative destruction and even creative corruption so long as it hastens the arrival of a future we assume will be better than the present. We’re a jealous people who react ferociously against all who dare interfere with our pursuit of happiness” (18/9).

not pretend, America proclaims liberty) und even ethical dispositions (*America's resolve*). Certainly, these personifications belong properly to political discourse, but linking them with the explicit naming of the people who form this whole (*this nation and its people, all the world and all the inhabitants thereof*) and, particularly, the involvement of these people through the use of the inclusive personal pronoun *we*,¹⁰ form a typical Bushian rhetorical pattern. This rhetorical pattern necessarily involves the Presidential *I*, who is not only the *Leader* and *Savior*, but whose ethical-moral *solemn duty* it is to protect the nation with its men and women from evil.¹¹

But it is not only a purely ethical-moral compassion based on the U.S. Constitution that unites him with these American men and women. His compassion of the American people is profoundly emotional.¹² Bush expressed

¹⁰ According to Beasley (2004), who studies the emergence of American national identity in the presidential rhetoric of George W. Bush (in a country where black Americans, certain religious minorities and in general each new wave of immigrants are not always recognized as being fully "American"), this *we* has only become possible as a result of 9/11: "The 'we' I uttered and, more to the point, felt so profoundly on September 11 was a different 'we' than I might have used on September 10. It was not a 'we' that referred to my most immediate and pragmatic everyday alliances—my family, my friends, my colleagues [...] My September 11 'we' was, in effect, the same 'we' of the U.S. Constitution, the monosyllabic signifier of a national political community" (Beasley, 2004:3).

¹¹ This solemn duty has been repeated by Bush thousands of times. This is illustrated by the following example, a note in *The Guardian* (September 3, 2004) on an hour-long speech at Madison Square Garden: "[...] the biggest cheers from delegates, as well as tears, came as he outlined his vision for America abroad. 'I believe the most solemn duty of the American president is to protect the American people. If America shows uncertainty and weakness in this decade the world will drift towards tragedy. This will not happen on my watch', he said" [<http://bit.ly/k3PKqP>].

¹² Patricia Owens (2007:83-84) considers this *compassion* to be part of neoconservative ideology and rhetoric: "The compassion of the 'American people' has traditionally been represented as the political terrain of the liberal-Left. But the sentiment has more recently been appropriated in the popular language and ideology of the Christian Right. The moral tone of 'compassionate conservatism' revolves around the distinctly neoconservative symbolism of faith and social attachment to the (traditional) family, nation and God [...] Compassionate conservatism is based on a moral clarity, explicitly billed as a corrective to the immoral, decadent, Clinton years. The religiosity of the Bush administration is not new to the United States or unique to the political right. And yet the political mobilisation of the religious right has been central to the shift of compassion from a liberal to a conservative concept and has shaped both domestic and foreign policy discourse". This hypothesis not only obscures the contrast

this very clearly in his *Address to a Joint Session of Congress Following 9/11 Attacks* on September 20, 2001:

I know many citizens have fears tonight, and I ask you to be calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat.

I ask you to uphold the values of America, and remember why so many have come here. We are in a fight for our principles, and our first responsibility is to live by them. No one should be singled out for unfair treatment or unkind words because of their ethnic background or religious faith.¹³

However, the second part of this quotation shows that this almost paternal compassion is at the same time instrumentalized in the fight against evil, which will become *war* two years later. For this purpose, Bush evokes the often observed scenario of threat which he once again establishes in his Second Inaugural Address in 2005 which we cited earlier: *America will not pretend that women welcome humiliation and servitude, or that any human being aspires to live at the mercy of bullies.*

As in all Bush's statements on this topic, the two speeches of 2001 and 2005 do not lack the explicitly made claim to the right and the duty derived from it to *guarantee* peace in the whole world in the name of humanity: *it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world*, as he put it in 2005. This is not just a part of neoconservative ideology, but it is—as Bush says in the same passage—*the moral duty of America from the day of our Founding: we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the*

between *bureaucratic vs. populist rhetoric* within the Bush Administration, but also overlooks the genuine “populist achievement” of George W. Bush: the success of the neoconservative ideology is not as a result of its inner logic but is due to the fact that Bush with his *ethos-pathos* rhetoric has been able to breathe “persuasive life” into it, so to speak, a rhetoric which—as we will see below—integrates specific elements of religious speech.

¹³ This quotation is also interesting and historically relevant for the reason that it makes evident an ideological “collateral” effect of the rhetorical construction of a national we-feeling: the explicit reference to anti-ethnic (and anti-immigrant) sentiments that are to be avoided in order to ensure better integration of these marginal groups [<http://bit.ly/lDTEuu>].

image of the Maker of Heaven and earth. That is why the struggle against the terrorists, as he put it in the Address on September 20, 2001, is in the final analysis a fight of the civilized world against terrorism:

This is not, however, just America's fight. And what is at stake is not just America's freedom. This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.¹⁴

Here we find, once again, Bush's (and America's) *sense of mission* based on a dichotomist and Manichean view of history: it is the mission of America to fight the evil propagated by terrorists and the axis of evil.

In the same speech Bush makes an explicit connection between Islamism and fascism, again with his usual personalizations:

These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life. With every atrocity, they hope that America grows fearful, retreating from the world and forsaking our friends. They stand against us, because we stand in their way.

We are not deceived by their pretenses to piety. We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions –by abandoning every value except the will to power– they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism.

¹⁴ Since I am dealing primarily with the ideological and rhetorical patterns and techniques involved in emotions, I cannot deal systematically with Bush's internal inconsistencies and contradictions. That is why I will only just briefly point out that Bush includes Saudi Arabia among these progressive and civilized states as well: the terrorists "hate our freedoms –our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other. They want to overthrow existing governments in many Muslim countries, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. They want to drive Israel out of the Middle East. They want to drive Christians and Jews out of vast regions of Asia and Africa. These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life. With every atrocity, they hope that America grows fearful, retreating from the world and forsaking our friends. They stand against us, because we stand in their way" [<http://bit.ly/lDTEuu>].

Manichaeian view of history and conservative evangelism

This Manichaeian view can be integrated without any problems into a religious discourse. This involves not only his metaphors or imagery of light and darkness, heaven and hell and other metaphors taken from the Bible.¹⁵ Particularly in the speeches that refer to 9/11 there is an abundance of religious references and allusions.¹⁶ Thus in his 9/11 *Address to the Nation* he refers explicitly to Psalm 23: *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me* [<http://bit.ly/j6f8tF>]. And the *Address* of September 20, 2001 ends with the prayer (*May God bless you, and may He watch over the United States of America*); even in the speech itself Bush implies that God is on his side:

Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment. Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom –the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time– now depends on us. Our nation –this generation– will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future [...] The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.

Here, again, Bush plays with virtuosity upon the rhetoric of emotions, which he presents this time as ethical and emotional dichotomies between freedom and fear, justice and cruelty –where his mission is to ensure the victory of the good. But, first and foremost: here again he does not claim explicitly that God is on the side of America but rather he implies it with his typical argument of tacit agreement:¹⁷ *we know that God is not neutral between them.*

¹⁵ Cf. Bhatia (2007). We return to the metaphor of the *mustard seed*, which Bush uses in his *conversion story*, below.

¹⁶ Michael Gerson (2004), Bush's speechwriter, himself calls the "literary allusions to hymns and scripture" a central, deliberately intended procedure; the other essential techniques mentioned by Gerson are: *comfort in grief and mourning; employ religious language to talk about the historic influence of faith on our country; talk about our faith-based welfare reform; refer to providence.*

¹⁷ The fact that this is a "regular guy" argument of tacit agreement is not seen by Riswold (2004). She opposes on the one hand the theodicy implied by Bush: "Are we either evil or good?"

An argument that can be translated in the following way: “since *we* know that America is *in fact* a chosen nation fulfilling God’s mission to spread freedom in the world, we don’t have to say this explicitly”.

This emotional *certainty* that God is on America’s side is also conveyed by Bush using quotations from the Bible which are not explicitly marked as such. Thus, Bush quotes the *Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans* in a national proclamation on September 13, where he announced that September 14 would be a “National Day of Prayer”, to remember and honor the fatalities of the attacks:

This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger. This conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others; it will end in a way and at an hour of our choosing. Our purpose as a nation is firm, yet our wounds as a people are recent and unhealed and lead us to pray [...] On this national day of prayer and remembrance, we ask almighty God to watch over our nation and grant us patience and resolve in all that is to come. We pray that He will comfort and console those who now walk in sorrow. We thank Him for each life we now must mourn, and the promise of a life to come. As we’ve been assured, neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth can separate us from God’s love [Epistle to the Romans 8:38; E.E.].¹⁸

May he bless the souls of the departed. May he comfort our own. And may he always guide our country.¹⁹

Either sinners or saints? Or are we not some kind of a chaotic mixture of these things?” and pleads for a “theodicy of compassion” (45), but on the other hand she considers his approach politically justified: “Bush’s speech was politically and socially crucial; it was monumental and moving. But theologically it undermined his own vision by failing to present a credible picture of God’s response to a world infected with terrorism and violence” (46). Riswold thus also overlooks the fact that Bush uses compassion rhetorically, but of course only for the good guys who are suffering from the evil.

¹⁸ The full text in the translation of the *New American Standard Bible 1960* is: “*For I am convinced* that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, *which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” [my italics].

¹⁹ *National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Speech*, September 13, 2001 [http://bit.ly/jh5evM].

It is therefore not surprising if conservative evangelicals, in particular the Baptists, consider Bush to be one of their own. Thus Richard Land, the director of the conservative evangelical Southern Baptist Convention, states in an interview in 2004:

I think that there's no question that this president [Bush] expresses his faith in overtly evangelical terms in a way that is much more recognizable, much more identifiable as being quote, "one of us" than the presidents that I've known in my lifetime (Land, 2004).²⁰

They have in fact so much in common that it is necessary to speak of a "confluence of conservative religious faith and politics" (Coe & Domke, 2006:310),²¹ or even as Bailey (2008:233) does, of a "consubstantiality".²²

²⁰ In the same interview Land emphasizes like Bush that God is with America: "The problem with the left is that some of them don't think God has a side. George Bush and most of George Bush's supporters believe God has a side, and we believe that side is freedom. We believe that side is democracy. We believe that side is respect for basic human rights". The right of the state to wage war against evil is also derived by him from the Bible: "You know, God instituted civil government. Romans 13 says God instituted civil government to punish those who do evil and to reward those who do that which is right, and that one of the options available to the civil magistrate is the use of lethal force. Romans 13:4, that the civil magistrate bears not the sword in vain. Now domestically, what that means is that if someone kills my wife, I don't have the right to go take personal vengeance on them. But I do have the right to expect the civil magistrate to punish that person for taking an innocent human life, and under certain circumstances –that they may have to pay with the forfeiture of their life for having taken another person's life".

²¹ According to Coe & Domke the presidential discourse about God increased significantly with Reagan: "our data [...] show that Reagan and Bush did even more than increase presidential discourse about God and the principles of freedom and liberty; they also linked them much more often than did other presidents and characterized this linkage differently than have most other modern presidents. Consider that Reagan and Bush explicitly connected God with freedom or liberty in more than three fourths of their Inaugural and State of the Union addresses –fully three times more often than other presidents did so" (Coe & Domke, 2006:323).

²² One of the few Republicans who complained about this as early as in 2005 is C. Danforth an Episcopal minister, and a former United States senator from Missouri, and United States ambassador to the United Nations: "By a series of recent initiatives, Republicans have transformed our party into the political arm of conservative Christians [...] Our current fixation on a religious agenda has turned us in the wrong direction. It is time for Republicans to rediscover our roots" [<http://nyti.ms/lHwaaE>].

That is why Bush has “a very high trust level”²³ with the conservative Baptists, according to Land. This level of trust that he had with all Christians was achieved using a rhetorically cleverly staged *story of conversion* in which he reveals how he was able to get rid of his alcohol problems and –by analogy with the Pauline Conversion narrative– found true faith, an experience that strengthened his conviction that God had chosen him to run for President. The rhetorical techniques of embellishment will be dealt with in the next section. I will only mention here a further narrative which can be traced back to the Bible, namely *Moses’ call from God to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt*, that moved Bush’s heart and soul on the morning of January 19, 1999 on the occasion of a sermon by Pastor Mark Craig –as he relates in his autobiography *A Charge to Keep* (Bush, 1999:8ff.). The result of this moving experience for Bush was that Craig’s sermon “had prodded me out of my comfortable life as Governor of Texas and toward a national campaign” (Bush, 1999:13; cf. Bailey, 2008:224ff.). The idea that this can also be understood as a sign from God is insinuated in a version often circulated:

Craig looked at Bush and said America was “starved for leadership”. The nation needed leaders with “ethical and moral courage”, who would “do good for the right reasons”. Turning to her son just after the sermon, Barbara Bush pointedly explained, “He was talking to you”.

Bush had been contemplating a run for president. Craig’s sermon helped convince him. His life would “never be the same”.²⁴

²³ Land (2004) speaks with the same voice as Bush: “Southern Baptists overwhelmingly supported the president’s action in Afghanistan and in Iraq [...] We needed to re-democratize the Middle East, and that was going to be very difficult to do with Saddam Hussein in power. I think that there’s also a very high trust level among white evangelicals and President George W. Bush. If he said that this is what we needed to do, then they were willing to give him the benefit of the doubt in doing it”. That this *consubstantiality* was worthwhile for Bush is shown by the following remarks of Kaplan’s: “Bush knows, and Christian right leaders know, that he couldn’t have been elected without them. Though white evangelicals constitute only about 25 percent of the national population, this highly motivated voting bloc made up 40 percent of Bush’s electorate in 2000, an amount he hopes to boost in 2004. When that number is combined with the most religiously observant Catholics, the total comes to 51 percent of all Bush votes in 2000. The Christian right is not just another special interest group, like the NRA. This is Bush’s base” (Kaplan, 2005:3).

²⁴ This anecdote is still being related in 2009 by Paul Kengor, professor of political science, and executive director of the Center for Vision & Values at Grove City College and author

Certainly, this narrative also has the purpose of “proving” Bush’s moral courage and integrity. These are obviously ethical dispositions that are part of, as already shown, the complementary set of emotions and characteristics in the Savior figure. These characteristics, which have been expressed in different ways in the quotations dealt with previously, are as follows: *resoluteness, decisiveness, strength, moral clarity, decency, good intentions*. These are linked to the following emotions: *confidence, trust, credit, certainty, assurance, hope*.

These are precisely the fields of emotions and characteristics which Bush and those associated with him have repeatedly appealed to. The following brief statement, which we can now describe as typical of Bush, evokes these emotions and characteristics:

By serving the ideal of liberty, we’re bringing hope to others, and that makes America more secure. By being resolute and strong, by working for the ideal of liberty.²⁵

Bush himself in his *Commencement Address at the United States Military Academy at West Point* on June 1, 2002 projected these characteristics onto “his” Americans and legitimized them on the basis of American history itself:

of *God and George W. Bush* (cf. Paul Kengor, “What Bush and Moses Have in Common”, in: *FrontPageMagazine.com*, January 19, 2009 [<http://bit.ly/izB7jk>]). But nowadays Kengor distances himself from Bush: “I’ve thought of that incident many times over the last eight years. I don’t want to overdo the Bush-Moses analogy, or draw any theological lessons from that church in Austin. But a few things jump out: Yes, it turned out that the 43rd president shared Moses’ conviction, moral courage, and faith in God. But he also, sadly, shared that lack of communication, a liability that doomed him. And it is that component of this story that strikes me”.

²⁵ Thus Bush in a speech at Southwest Missouri State University July 30, 2004 [<http://bit.ly/jbGRkG>]. The fact that a wide swathe of the populace advocated these values is shown by the following quotation from Greg Crosby, “Giving Thanks”, in: *Jewish World Review* 11/16, 2001: “Let’s be thankful in particular that we have a strong, resolute president in the White House. George W. Bush is a good and decent man with high principles, moral clarity, and an excellent team. The people around him are seasoned pros. No ‘on the job training’ going on here, thank heavens. And let’s give thanks for our true friends abroad, like Prime Minister Tony Blair in the UK. He was there with us in a heartbeat, offering unconditional support and encouragement” [<http://bit.ly/IL9eFH>].

And our security will require all Americans to be forward-looking and resolute, to be ready for preemptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives.

Yet, moral clarity was essential to our victory in the cold war. When leaders like John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan refused to gloss over the brutality of tyrants, they gave hope to prisoners and dissidents and exiles and rallied free nations to a great cause.

And finally, America stands for more than the absence of war. We have a great opportunity to extend a just peace by replacing poverty, repression, and resentment around the world with hope of a better day [<http://bit.ly/iDKubO>].

*Bush's religious policy, ethos, pathos,
archetypal patterns: means of persuasion*

We can now summarize the set of ideological elements of Bush's political discourse. The basis of his ideological matrix is a Manichean view of the world in terms of good and evil, the evil being incarnated by the axis of evil, the international terrorists and all their allies. All these spread fright and horror and threaten peace because they are fanatic outlaws who commit atrocious and awful crimes against innocent men, women and children; their leaders are often satanic tyrants who commit crimes against humanity because they have no regard for rules of morality. If they are in the possession of dangerous weapons of mass destruction (WMD), they represent grave and imminent danger. By virtue of its economic and military power, the United States stands as the world's preeminent power that has a natural and God-given claim to global leadership. That is why it is its historical duty to anticipate and counter threats, all over the world, if necessary preemptively, before the threats can do grave damage. By doing this, the United States, the chosen Nation, spreads democracy, freedom, equality and capitalism, answering in this way to a universal moral and legitimate imperative: "From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth" (George W. Bush).

The fact that Saddam possesses WMD, or more precisely the fact that he *could* possess WMD in all likelihood, obliged the United States morally to make war on Iraq. To win this war, the United States needs a President who shows, in the name of God, resoluteness, decisiveness, strength, moral clarity, decency and good intentions; a leader who understands the people because he is the “regular guy” who speaks their language and who feels with them, a God-chosen guide who gives them confidence, trust, assurance and hope.

Now this ideological matrix can be used to explain the tremendous success of President Bush. As we saw, this involves above all his clever maneuvering and manipulation of emotions, in particular of the fear of death. This *existential fear or anguish* is the central and essential persuasive factor according to *Terror Management Theory* (TMT). *Terror Management Theory*,²⁶ developed primarily by Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon, has shown in a range of empirical studies that people who are confronted with death and mortality react with distinct defensive responses if these (1) “are activated by thoughts of death that are conscious” or if these (2) “are on the fringes of consciousness (highly accessible but not in current focal attention)”. In the first case they respond consciously by invoking the usual psychological defenses—for instance, telling themselves that “it’s not me, now”—or they avoid the possible sources of the lethal threat (for example many Americans avoided airports and large buildings after 9/11); in the second case they maintain unconsciously “self-esteem and faith in [their] cultural worldview”, in this case “terror management defenses [...] serve to control the potential for anxiety resulting from awareness of the inevitability of death” (Landau *et al.*, 2007:482-483). That is why people, “after mortality salience”, i.e. when they are reminded unconsciously of death, increase their favorable evaluations of people who share the values of their cultural worldview as well as their unfavorable evaluations of people with other

²⁶ This theory is based on the studies of the anthropologist Ernest Becker (cf. particularly his book *The Denial of Death*). For Becker the fear of death and its denial directs human behavior in a substantial way. Becker refers above all to Søren Kierkegaard, Charles Darwin, William James, Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank and Norman Brown, but his theory is perfectly compatible with Aristotle’s psychology, politics and rhetorical theory of emotions, especially because he conceives of humans as social and cultural animals. According to Becker, the creation of a cultural worldview serves to reduce or eliminate the *angst* (i.e. the existential fear of death) and thus confers the possibility of symbolic immortality. For an instructive popular overview of TMT see Judis (2007).

political and cultural views. According to Sheldon Solomon the depreciation of the other culture might have the result that “we scapegoat a group as the repository of evil. The most benign form is devaluing the threat posed by the alternative worldview. We also might try to convince others to shed their ideas and adopt ours, as in missionary work. Most chillingly, we can kill the culturally different, to prove that our way is the most powerful” (Dess, 2002). In line with these hypotheses, Bush’s popularity shot up after the massive invoking of terror and death by 9/11. Accordingly, studies by Landau *et al.* (2004) showed that Bush’s continuous and massive stigmatization of Saddam and the axis of evil as well as his repeated reminders of 9/11 increased his popularity and his charisma dramatically. These results were confirmed by a later study that provided support for John Kerry’s assertion that the attacks of 9/11 “were the ‘central deciding thing’ in his contest with President Bush and that the release of an Osama bin Laden videotape the weekend before Election Day had effectively erased any hope he had of victory” (Cohen *et al.*, 2005:2).

Even if the phenomena demonstrated by *Terror Management Theory* need to be viewed as an important factor in the actual (electoral) behavior of the citizens of the U.S., the *monocausal* explanation it provides is not convincing: the particular empirical aspects studied have in every respect too simple a structure (and are thus too abstract with regard to the “Lebenswelt”, the world of experience) to do justice even to the complex communicative situation: thus actual electoral behavior is not only determined by a diffuse unconscious fear of a (possibly fatal) threat. Here, the traditional rhetorical theory reflects the complexity of societal processes of persuasion and decision in a considerably more adequate way, since it does not just take into consideration human pathos, but always conceives of this in its complex and contradictory interplay with *ethos* and *logos*.

One should not of course deduce from this that this venerable edifice of rhetoric provides the only key for public processes of persuasion. In this context the persuasive force of *collective and archetypal patterns and narratives*²⁷ that refer to a deep level of the cultural construction and understanding should not be overlooked. This includes the *Pauline conversion narrative* previously

²⁷ These were well known to traditional rhetoric and were treated as historical *paradeigmata* or *exempla*.

mentioned and of course the *savior strategy*, whose *specific implementation* by Bush we analyzed above. However differently this mold may be filled by individual politicians,²⁸ its persuasive force results from the fact that it represents an explanatory model in which complex problems can be simply and unambiguously resolved.

The savior pattern consists of three parts or roles: the enemy, the victim and the savior. The enemy and the victim are organized in a dichotomous manner, where the enemy is the cause of the evil, the victim on the other hand is good and innocent and is virtually unprotected and at the mercy of the enemy's actions. Unless an end is put to these actions, this will lead to an apocalypse. This results in the great role of the savior: not only does he have to help the victim and destroy the enemy, he also has to restore the *Order of the World*.

The savior must convey all of this by means of adequate language and rhetoric as well as by means of an appropriate appeal to *ethos* and *pathos*. Bush made appropriate appeals to the emotions by simultaneously evoking *fear* and *confidence*. This was also persuasive for the reason that Bush always knew how to combine it with a Christian fundamentalist ideology, and above all: he knew how to insinuate that not only the United States was a chosen nation, but also that he, George W. Bush, was a chosen President. It has become clear by now that this God of Bush's is not a loving God, but is rather an avenging God as in the Old Testament. Thus he said in his *Address* on 20 September, 2001:

Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime [<http://bit.ly/kVhc3E>].

This *ad baculum* argument –appeal to fear– (Walton, 1996) threatens absent listeners, i.e. all nations that support terrorism, in the sense that it menaces them and threatens them with harmful consequences. These menaces were also –as we now know– aimed at every individual who appeared to be fighting Bush's America: he faced torture and death.

²⁸The particular form of the savior pattern depends of course on the specific historical and sociopolitical conditions of a country; cf. my analysis of the savior strategy of the right-wing populist politician Le Pen in France (Eggs, 1993:103ff.).

Bush's populist rhetoric: evidences, repetitions, analogies and associative techniques

The fact should not be overlooked that Bush's considerable success is essentially due to his populist rhetoric. To put it another way: Wolfowitz would never have been able to convince the Americans of the necessity to wage war against Iraq –even if he had adopted Bush's religious allusions and techniques of emotionalization.

We must therefore look at a series of linguistic and rhetorical characteristics of Bush's language and style, without wishing to claim that we have covered all the aspect. One noticeable aspect is that his vocabulary and his syntax, especially in spontaneous speaking situations such as press conferences, is marked by a *colloquial simplicity* which ensures that he is understood by the average American, and it is for precisely this reason that he is able to persuade his listeners easily. This corresponds exactly to his self-presentation as a “regular guy” as mentioned previously. The following example –which I will not comment on– serves to illustrate this: “I'm the kind of fellow who does what I think is right, and will continue to do what I think is right”.²⁹ This uncomplicated –typical “American”– can be seen in the word *job*, the word probably most frequently used by Bush. The “regular guy” aspect mentioned previously becomes apparent in his rhetoric even on the level of *word use*. Thus five days after September 11, 2001 Bush compares his work quite simply with a *job*.³⁰

I also have faith in our military. And we have got a job to do –just like the farmers and ranchers and business owners and factory workers have a job to do. My administration has a job to do, and we're going to do it. We will

²⁹ This sentence can be interpreted as a revealing Freudian slip. Even if it is not grammatically correct due to the mistake in agreement, it does not follow that it is not persuasive. Since Bush also has problems with vocabulary (which is why he is also called “master of malapropism”) and syntax, there is a large number of internet sites which list them with a greater or lesser degree of pleasure (cf. the fairly serious sites of Richard Norquist [<http://bit.ly/jjOQGA>], and of Dubya-The Grammarian [<http://bit.ly/irzjJD>]). Bush often makes ironic explicit allusions to these language slips –with the result that he is surely perceived as a nice, decent regular guy.

³⁰ This does not exclude the fact that he also exploits the range of meanings associated with the word *job*: position, work, task, duty.

rid the world of the evil-doers. We will call together freedom loving people to fight terrorism.

And on this day of –on the Lord’s Day, I say to my fellow Americans, thank you for your prayers, thank you for your compassion, thank you for your love for one another. And tomorrow when you get back to work, work hard like you always have. But we’ve been warned. We’ve been warned there are evil people in this world. We’ve been warned so vividly –and we’ll be alert. Your government is alert. The governors and mayors are alert that evil folks still lurk out there [<http://bit.ly/mT49UK>].

This common-sense comparison forms a leitmotif running through Bush’s speech.³¹ Thus in a press conference on April 2004 he stresses: “I don’t plan on losing my job” [<http://bit.ly/lhpXLM>]. And in an interview in September 2006 in which the president acknowledged, for the first time, the existence of secret CIA prisons around the world, he says:

I mean that a defeat in Iraq will embolden the enemy, and will provide the enemy more opportunity, to train, plan to attack us, that’s what I mean. One of the hardest parts of my job is to connect Iraq to the war on terror, Mr. Bush said. I believe it, but the American people have got to understand that a defeat in Iraq, in other words if this government there fails, the terrorists will be emboldened, the radicals will topple moderate governments. I truly believe that this is the ideological struggle of the 21st century. And the consequences for not achieving success are dire.³²

³¹ This is of course not restricted to the Iraq War. He also used it to justify his tax cuts in spring 2001 that privileged rich Americans: “Oftentimes what I try to say in Washington gets filtered and sometimes my words in Washington don’t exactly translate *directly to the people*. So I’ve found it’s best to travel the country [...] You see, it’s the president’s *job* to look for warnings of economic trouble ahead and to heed them, and to act. I got elected because *the people want the president to act*, and that’s exactly what I’m going to do. *My approach is based upon common sense*, and here it is: *We must* put more money in the hands of consumers in the short term and restore confidence and optimism for the long term. *We need* an immediate stimulus for our economy and a pro-growth environment for years to come [...] Immediate tax relief *is good news*, but tax relief that gets yanked away next year *is not such good news*” 47 (479/80) “Excerpts from Bush Speech Promoting His Tax Cuts”, *New York Times*, March 28, 2001, A16 [<http://nyti.ms/lb655y>] (my italics).

³² It follows from our remarks that it is certainly not an accident that the CBS News transcription is titled: “Bush: ‘We Don’t Torture’. President Tells Katie Couric That Connecting Iraq To War On Terror Is Hardest Part Of His *Job*” (emphasis added) [<http://bit.ly/is1YFH>] (September 6, 2006).

All this shows not only that the description *job* is also used to euphemize the conduct of war but also that Bush thinks of politics and history in terms of *personal* conflicts.

Bush's use of metaphors exhibits populist characteristics as well: their domain of comparison reflects not just areas of experience from everyday life, but also –as already noted– religious areas of experience. After 9/11, they are often selected in such a way that they evoke *fear* and *fright*. Thus for example in the following speech made in September 2002 in the Cincinnati Museum Center the aspects of *threat* are presented as a visual image, using the following memorable metaphor:

We've experienced the horror of September the 11th. We have seen that those who hate America are willing to crash airplanes into buildings full of innocent people. Our enemies would be no less willing, in fact, they would be eager, to use biological or chemical, or a nuclear weapon.

Knowing these realities, America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof –the smoking gun– that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.³³

This “frightening” metaphor, familiar to every American, is used by the entire Bush Administration. For example, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice had spoken a month previously in an interview with CNN of a *smoking gun* that takes the form of a *mushroom cloud*:

The problem here is that there will always be some uncertainty about how quickly he [Saddam] can acquire nuclear weapons. But we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud [<http://bit.ly/IV2Ddm>].

And when the question later arises of a pullout from Iraq, Bush makes use of the metaphor *cauldron of chaos* in order to prevent this development. Thus he says on May 7, 2007:

[The pull out] risked turning Iraq into a cauldron of chaos. Our enemy, the enemies of freedom, love chaos. Out of that chaos they could find new safe

³³ *Remarks by the President on Iraq* (07/10/2002) [<http://bit.ly/myKr84>].

havens. Withdrawal would have emboldened these radicals and extremists. It would have confirmed their belief that our nations were weak. It would help them gain new recruits, new resources. It would cause them to believe they could strike free nations at their choice [<http://bit.ly/mapQZv>].

For Bush it is not just about vivid visualization or imagery, and this can be seen from his use of the standard simile *ticking time bomb* in his *State of the Union Address* on January 29, 2002:

What we have found in Afghanistan confirms that, far from ending there, our war against terror is only beginning. Most of the 19 men who hijacked planes on September the 11th were trained in Afghanistan's camps. And so were TENS OF THOUSANDS of others. THOUSANDS of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, *often supported by outlaw regimes*, are now SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD *like* TICKING TIME BOMBS, set TO GO OFF WITHOUT WARNING [<http://bit.ly/mm4rt5>] (my emph.).

His many exaggerations,³⁴ combined with unsupported assumptions (*often supported by outlaw regimes*) show that Bush is very proficient in the technique –prominent in traditional rhetoric– of hyperbolic representation and amplification. But similes, metaphors and analogies do not just serve the purpose of amplification: their particular task here is to evoke an abundant number of tacit associations.

While in the following example: “Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world” (Bush 20/11) these associations are accessible, they are highly condensed in the key expression *axis of evil*. Eubanks & Schaefer (2004:62) –along with many others– have rightly underscored the fact that the word *axis* “connotes

³⁴ Murphy (2003:609ff.) concludes from the fact that Bush's discourses are highly amplificatory that Bush's speeches can be assigned to the *epideictic speech genre*. Apart from the fact that it is in principle problematic to transfer the traditional rhetorical genres, which refer of course to oral and direct communication, to modern mass media forms of communication, one cannot conclude from heavy use of amplifications that we are dealing with epideictic speech: *deliberative discourses* too (to which most of Bush's speeches –taking into account their communication via media– could be assigned) may involve a very high degree of amplification.

the ‘axis powers’ of World War II –Germany, Italy, and Japan”; but they fail to see the associative density of this allusion, which consists in the fact that the (planned) war against Iraq can thus also be “sold” in the same way as the liberation of Germany from fascism. Bush has emphasized this again and again at various points:³⁵

Even as we fight evil regimes we are generous to the people they oppress. Following World War II, America fed and rebuilt Japan and Germany, and their people became some of our closest friends in the world.³⁶

An additional important point in this context is the fact that Bush can present his actions as being part of the continuity of American history. This is also indirectly confirmed by speechwriter David Frum:

No country on Earth more closely resembled one of the old Axis powers than present-day Iraq. And just as FDR [Franklin D. Roosevelt] saw in Pearl Harbor a premonition of even more terrible attacks from Nazi Germany, so September 11 had delivered an urgent warning of what Saddam Hussein could and almost certainly would do with nuclear and biological weapons [<http://bit.ly/j9zQuX>].

This analogy argument explains on the one hand that the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor did not heighten the fear of Japan but rather the fear of Nazi Germany, the real source of danger; on the other hand, the conclusion is drawn that it is not the terrorists who caused 9/11 who represent the threat but rather the villain Saddam. The metaphor *axis* implies a firm alliance between the states referred to (North Korea, Iran and Iraq) –which was not the case. Obviously, the field of associations of the expression *axis of evil* also includes the religious references dealt with above. According to Frum, these religious associations were ultimately decisive in the choice of the final expression:

³⁵ Cf. also in relation to Afghanistan: “As a proud and independent people, Iraqis do not support an indefinite occupation, and neither does America. We’re not an imperial power, as nations such as Japan and Germany can attest. We’re a liberating power, as nations in Europe and Asia can attest as well”. (Transcript of Bush’s Remarks on Iraq: “We Will Finish the Work of the Fallen”) Published: *New York Times*, April 14, 2004 [<http://nyti.ms/mlfUbh>].

³⁶ Radio address to the Nation on October 6, 2001 (Bush, 2003:32-33).

initially, the axis was to be called *axis of hatred*—which would have been too abstract and purely emotional. The expression *axis of evil* can be used to evoke not only the *devil* but also all the *archetypical patterns* associated with it.

The process of *insinuation using associations not made explicit* has become clear; it must—also as a result of observations made elsewhere in this article—be regarded as symptomatic of the American President George W. Bush. That is why it can also be demonstrated in the context of more complex text structures. Let us look at the following passage from the 20/11 speech:

On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. (1) Americans have known wars –BUT for the past 136 years, they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941. (2) Americans have known the casualties of war –BUT not at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning. (3) Americans have known surprise attacks –BUT never before on thousands of civilians. All of this was brought upon us IN A SINGLE DAY—and³⁷ night fell on a different world, *a world where freedom itself is under attack* (my num. and emph.).

In this three-part anaphorical sequence, the contrastive-*but* elements refer in each case to a unique and outrageous aspect of 9/11. Put together, they form a climax sequence whose climax is *the death of thousands of civilians*. The unique character of the 9/11 attack is hyperbolically amplified by the fact that all three aspects mentioned are compressed into ((in a single day)). But it continues: the final *and night fell* [...] opens up a field of biblical associations and marks at the same time *a different world*. This is finally established in an illegitimate generalization—as a world *where freedom itself is under attack*.

The fields of association outlined here can only of course be opened up if they are based on a clear and repetitive text structure, i.e. if they take into account the venerable rhetorical *principle of variation in the identical*. Here Bush is a master. In all of his speeches we find the current and established figures of repetitions: alliteration, assonance, anaphora, conduplicatio, parallelism, chiasmus, climax, periphrasis and so on. Indeed repetition is basically the

³⁷ The *and* here is also used “associatively”. It may be presented on the surface as biblical narrative, but it clearly has a conclusive function which marks the conclusion from the climax.

foundation which opens up to him the possibility of associative insinuation. However, on the cognitive and logical level this implies redundancies, pleonasm, circular arguments or tautologies. To put it in another way: Bush's rhetoric is neither developing nor argumentative.

The French rhetorician Buffier in his *Traité philosophique et pratique d'éloquence* (1728) viewed repetition as a central means of persuasion: it works namely like "the repeated blows of a hammer" which "are able to deform a piece of iron imperceptibly and to break it". If repetition is not used in a speech, we are not emotionally touched and "struck" (Buffier, 1728:112 and 119; cf. Eggs, 2008:186ff.). However, repetition is only effective if *variation* is guaranteed. It seems as if Bush and his speechwriters were very familiar with this stylistic principle.

The rhetorical embellishment of the Pauline conversion pattern

In order to understand how variation in the identical as practiced by Bush can easily lead to embellishment as well, we must finally analyze how Bush embellished the archetypical Pauline conversion narrative with the intention of gaining the emotions of *trust and confidence* in the heart of Christian Americans –something which he managed very successfully. This narrative is a representative exemplum of Christian conversion which became across the centuries "the archetypical conversion story" (Bailey, 2008:218) for Christian societies. The plot of this story contains three phases: *transgression, transformation, commissioning*. The first phase of transgression is determined by guilt and shame felt by the protagonist over his bad life and sins. The transformation phase where the emotions of delight and exaltation predominate is marked by a radical peripeteia: "A man's life divided in twain: the first part was rife with worldliness and sin; the second showed forth the beauty of a changed life" (Bormann, 2001:89; cf. Bailey, 2008:219ff.). Finally, the last commissioning phase "involves the protagonist's description of purpose and renewed mission that he or she accepts as a result of the conversion experience" (Bailey, 2008:220). It is important to see that the conversion in the transformation phase must be characterized by three typical factors: *existential crisis, suddenness, specific time and place*.

Now it is interesting that Bush amplifies the commissioning phase, while he minimizes the phase of transgression and the existential crisis associated with it. Also, the suddenness which is typical of the transformation phase can only be created artificially with the help of a biblical metaphor. In his book *A Charge to Keep* (1999), in which he accounts for his decision to quit drinking in 1986, he reports, however, that this decision had been planted in his soul the year before in a conversation with the Evangelist Billy Graham:

One evening my dad asked Billy to answer questions from a big group of family gathered for the weekend. He sat by the fire and talked. And what he said sparked a change in my heart. I don't remember the exact words. It was more the power of his example. The Lord was so clearly reflected in his gentle and loving demeanor. The next day we walked and talked at Walker's Point, and I knew I was in the presence of a great man. He was like a magnet [...] He didn't lecture or admonish; he shared warmth and concern. Billy Graham didn't make you feel guilty; he made you feel loved. Over the course of that weekend, *Reverend Graham planted a mustard seed in my soul, a seed that grew over the next year* (Bush, 1999:136) (my italics).

This narrative presentation has obviously several functions: first of all, the use of this well-known metaphor which goes back to Jesus demonstrates Bush's familiarity with the Bible; secondly, this metaphor guarantees the suddenness ("the mustard seed was suddenly in Bush's soul"); thirdly, the special circumstances with Billy Graham fulfill the criterion of the specific time and place; finally, the fact that Graham the "transformer" is a world-renowned evangelist and recognized in conservative Christian circles³⁸ amplifies considerably the importance of Bush's conversion and above all the

³⁸ Bush does not mention in his book *A Charge to Keep* that a year before the meeting with Graham he said a sinner's prayer of repentance with the evangelist Arthur Blessitt. Blessitt noted in his diary: "A good and powerful day. Led Vice President Bush's son to Jesus today. George Bush Jr.! This is great! Glory to God". A copy of this note as well as the entire prayer can be seen on Blessitt's homepage [<http://bit.ly/mjkPGz>]. Bailey (2008:227-228) sees two motives for this omission: on the one hand, "the moment of spiritual transformation at one place and time" wouldn't have been respected, on the other hand he wouldn't be the ideal model: "Blessitt's minimal celebrity in certain evangelical circles lacks the almost universal appeal of Graham's".

final commissioning phase. If one considers that Saint Paul became, in the commissioning phase, the great Christian leader chosen by God, it is clear what purpose Bush's embellishment of the Saint Paul's narrative fulfilled: it was intended to legitimize Bush as God's chosen presidential candidate. Now a candidate who openly said that he had been chosen by God would certainly expose himself to ridicule even in the U.S. That is why Bush has always only insinuated this, as we have seen –or allowed it to be said by others. Thus for example Stephen Mansfield (2003:109) in his presidential hagiography *The Faith of George W. Bush* writes that Bush had said to James Robison, a fellow Texan and a religious broadcaster:

I feel like God wants me to run for President. I can't explain it, but I sense my country is going to need me. Something is going to happen [...] I know it won't be easy on me or my family, but God wants me to do it.³⁹

But in order to avoid any doubts arising especially in the minds of Christian voters that in terms of his character he is not really suited to be President, Bush added a further embellishment to the Pauline conversion narrative in the commissioning phase. For if Bush's sin had been *too large*, i.e. if he had confessed that he had been a real alcoholic, then he would have crossed the Rubicon in the eyes of the pious American believer. That is why he minimized and played down his "sin": I had a drinking problem. I won't say I was an alcoholic, but it affected *my relationships, even with my kids. It could have destroyed me. But I've given my life to Christ* (cf. Mansfield, 2003:109). And in Bush (1999:133ff.) he "confessed": *when I was young and irresponsible, I sometimes behaved young and irresponsibly.*

³⁹ Cf. also Paul Harris "Bush says God chose him to lead his nation", in: *The Observer*, November 2, 2003 [<http://bit.ly/15b7Mq>], and [<http://bit.ly/mNSXwB>]. Cf. the critical study by Urban (2005:145ff).

Obama's audacity of hope: argumentation, values, faith

Obama's classical rhetoric: figures and argumentative structures

In Obama's speeches too, repetition, especially the use of the tricolon, is a dominant stylistic feature. The grammarian Nordquist (2008) even thought that he had discovered "Obama's secret –or one part of it, at least for stirring a crowd". We can find two tricolons –i.e. units made of three parts (words, phrases or sentences)—⁴⁰ in Obama's victory speech on November 8, 2008:

The road ahead will be long [...] There will be setbacks and false starts. There are many who won't agree with every decision or policy I make as president. And we know the government can't solve every problem. But (1) *I will always be honest* with you about the challenges we face. (2) *I will listen to you*, especially when we disagree. And, ABOVE ALL, (3) *I will ask you to join* in the work of remaking this nation, the only way it's been done in America for 221 years –(i) block by block, (ii) brick by brick, (iii) calloused hand by calloused hand [<http://bit.ly/kVAsmi>] (my numbering and emphasis).

The first tricolon (1)-(3) is explicitly sequenced by Obama using the marker *above all*; the second one (i)-(iii) is likewise ordered but this time *semantically*, because the last element connotes something like "experienced hands". Note also the internal repetitions based on the figure of parallelism. The whole tricolon (i)-(iii) is an extended metaphor that apparently serves to evoke Obama's acquaintance with the world of work, especially the building trade. A glance at the *values* conveyed using these structures of repetition shows that it is not a matter of art for art's sake, but rather it is about essential aspects of Obama's policy: openness, honesty, disposition for teamwork. These aspects are addressed explicitly, in contrast to Bush, and are not insinuated using implicit associations.

⁴⁰ The tricolon is often used as a purely parallel series of three elements and opposed to climax or other ordered series. Since from a rhetorical point of view its elements have usually different emphatic and argumentative functions, we use the term tricolon as the superordinate term for all units made of three parts.

The following remarks made by Obama *Against Going to War in Iraq* from October 2, 2002 constitute a veritable rhetorical firework of repetition *and* variation:

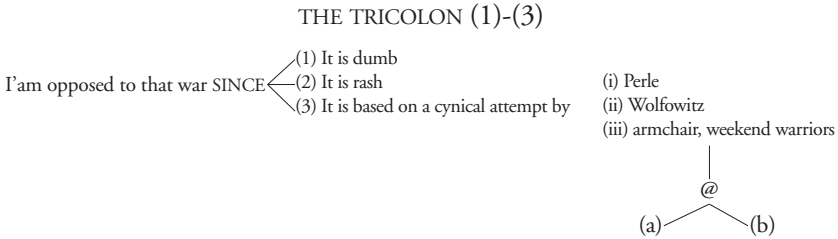
After September 11th, after witnessing the carnage and destruction, the dust and the tears, I supported this administration's pledge to hunt down and root out those who would slaughter innocents in the name of intolerance, and I would willingly take up arms myself to prevent such tragedy from happening again. I don't oppose all wars [...] (1) *What I am opposed to is a DUMB war.* (2) *What I am opposed to is a RASH war.* (3) *What I am opposed to is the CYNICAL ATTEMPT by (i) Richard Perle and (ii) Paul Wolfowitz and (iii) other armchair, weekend warriors in this administration (@) to shove their own ideological agendas down our throats, (a) irrespective of the costs in lives lost and (b) in hardships borne.*

(4) *What I am opposed to is the attempt by political hacks like Karl Rove to distract us from (z) a rise in the uninsured, (z') a rise in the poverty rate, (z'') a drop in the median income to distract us from corporate scandals and a stock market that has just gone through the worst month since the Great Depression.* (4') *That's what I'm opposed to.* (x') *A dumb war.* (x'') *A rash war.* (x''') *A war based not on reason BUT on passion, not on principle BUT on politics.* I suffer no illusions about Saddam Hussein. (y') *He is a brutal man. A ruthless man. A man who butchers his own people to secure his own power.* (y'') *He has repeatedly defied UN resolutions, thwarted UN inspection teams, developed chemical and biological weapons, and coveted nuclear capacity.* (y''') *He's a bad guy. The world, and the Iraqi people, would be better off without him* [<http://bit.ly/15G6yj>].

One could take the series (1)-(4') as a pentacolon (i.e. a series with five members) but since (4) and (4') form a unity due to use of the diacope.⁴¹ I prefer to distinguish the tricolon (1)-(2) and the diacope (4)-(4'). This implies that *combative* speeches like the remarks quoted contain certain *recursive elements* which are generally believed to contribute to strong emotionalization.

⁴¹ Diacope = the repetition of a word or phrase embedding with one or more unities between; used in traditional rhetoric to express deep feeling.

But first of all let us have a closer look at the structure of the section we have chosen. As the following scheme for the tricolon in the first section shows, this represents a complex but clearly ordered argumentative bloc.



(1)-(2) are the main arguments to prove the thesis: *I am opposed to that war*. In argument (3) the *cynical attempt* is further explained using the tricolon (i)-(iii). It is important to note that due to the use of the expression AND OTHER, Perle and Wolfowitz are classified as *armchair, weekend warriors* as well. Their practices are devaluated by the drastic metaphor @ *they shove their own ideological agendas down our throats*, which then finally allows him to qualify these intellectual neoconservatives as being ruthless in two respects. Some may accuse Obama of using an excessively vulgar metaphor (which considering the brutalities committed during the war instigated by the neoconservatives certainly gives pause for thought), but Obama cannot be accused of not stating and justifying his statements explicitly and clearly –without any Bushian insinuation.

In the second section the *repetitio* is intensified by the diacope (4)-(4') and the recapitulation of the main arguments (x') and (x'') –*a dumb and rash war*– but at the same time it is varied as in the first section: in the third member (x''') of this tricolon, a climax, the main argument against the war is put forward: *A war based not on reason but on passion, not on principle but on politics*, which becomes even more powerful due to the fact that it is expressed in the form of a parallelism with a contrastive internal structure. The closing argumentative bloc (B) anticipates the foreseeable objection of an external opponent that he is a coward and traitor to the Nation, because he does not want to recognize the threat presented by the villain Saddam. These arguments, which are frequently used by Obama and which anticipate

possible objections, we call *polyphonic*. But the argumentative polyphonic bloc (B) is also embedded in a pattern of repetition: it is, in fact, the second member of a “cognitive” diacope, the first member being the last part of the introduction: *I don't oppose war*.

It's certainly striking that Obama steals Bush's thunder with this argumentation: like the latter he shows compassion with the victims of 9/11 and like the latter he stigmatizes Saddam as a bad guy. At the same time he says explicitly in the contrastive structure (x'') what Bush does not have: *reason and principles*.

The excerpts analyzed up to now have shown that Obama's use of the principle of variation in the identical is –in contrast to Bush's use– not only characterized by both a more complex and a clearer structure, but also avoids all the insinuations typical of Bush. It has also become clear that Obama's speeches differ from Bush's tautological structures in their specific argumentative development. In order to bring out the significance of this aspect, let us have a look at a longer text. The following text is from the *Address to Joint Session of Congress* of February 27, 2009. In this speech to the Joint Session of Congress, every President has to present his program at the beginning of his term of office. Since the entire speech is clearly structured, exhibits only few recursive elements and at the same time exhibits a clever combination of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* which never makes a theatrical-pathetic impression, it comes very close to being a classic deliberative speech. The following excerpt is part of a subsection where Obama explains how he will invest the budgets he submits. He distinguishes “three areas that are absolutely critical to our economic future: *energy, health care, and education*”. The following extract discusses *health care*.

[...] we must also address the crushing cost of health care.

(I) (f1) This is a cost that now causes a bankruptcy in America every thirty seconds. (f2) By the end of the year, it could cause 1.5 million Americans to lose their homes. (f3) In the last eight years, premiums have grown four times faster than wages. (f4) And in each of these years, one million more Americans have lost their health insurance. (a1) It is one of the major reasons why small businesses close their doors and corporations ship jobs overseas. And (a2) it's one of the largest and fastest-growing parts of our budget. GIVEN THESE FACTS, (c) *we can NO LONGER afford to put health care reform on hold*.

(II) (p) Already, we have done more to advance the cause of health care reform in the last thirty days than we have in the last decade. (a4) When it was days old, this Congress passed a law to provide and protect health insurance for eleven million American children whose parents work full-time. (f) Our recovery plan will invest in electronic health records and new technology that will reduce errors, bring down costs, ensure privacy, and save lives. It will launch a new effort to conquer a disease that has touched the life of nearly every American by seeking a cure for cancer in our time. And it makes the largest investment ever in preventive care, because that is one of the best ways to keep our people healthy and our costs under control.

(III) This budget builds on these reforms. (e1) It includes an historic commitment to comprehensive health care reform –a down-payment on the principle that we must have quality, affordable health care for every American. (e2) It's a commitment that's paid for in part by efficiencies in our system that are long overdue. (e3) And it's a step we must take if we hope to bring down our deficit in the years to come.

(IV) Now, there will be many different opinions and ideas about how to achieve reform, and that is why I'm bringing together (t') businesses and workers, (t'') doctors and health care providers, (t''') Democrats and Republicans to begin work on this issue next week.

(V) I suffer no illusions that this will be an easy process. It will be hard. But I also know that nearly a century after Teddy Roosevelt first called for reform, the cost of our health care has weighed down our economy and the conscience of our nation long enough. So let there be no doubt: *HEALTH CARE REFORM (I) CANNOT WAIT, (II) IT MUST NOT WAIT, AND (III) IT WILL NOT WAIT ANOTHER YEAR* (my num. and emph.).⁴²

The composition of this argumentation –with the exception of point (IV)– reflects the essential patterns of the deliberative genre: (I) exposition of the current, negative situation; (II) account of the (p) past measures and the (f) future measures; (III) logical and ethical justification of the measures; (IV) procedures of democratic (ideal) organization to find just and equitable solutions;⁴³ (V) peroration with epideictic elements concerning common

⁴² *Transcription* [<http://1.usa.gov/joHFfR0>], *Spanish version* [<http://1.usa.gov/ktaa4X>], *video version* [<http://1.usa.gov/jdUoEO>].

⁴³ This aspect has been underlined by Winters (2009:2-3): “The change Obama promised was not merely a change from the ways of George W. Bush, but a change from the slash-and-

history and with a condensed summary. The internal structure of these parts is also organized in a very sober manner: thus we have in (I) a conclusion (c) that is based on factual (f1)-(f4) and on appreciative (a1)-(a2) arguments. But this conclusion is not only logical, because the polyphonic *no longer* in the conclusion marks an implicit critique of the Bush administration: did Bush not do everything in his power to prevent health care reform?

The entire section—as well as the entire *Address to Joint Session of Congress*—conveys professional competence, judgment and the honest intention to implement the health care reform. Since the American health care system is the expression of social injustice, which is also demonstrated by the facts listed by Obama in Block (I), this reform is also an expression of justice and equity.⁴⁴ Section (IV), which is typical of Obama, shows furthermore that he is open to democratic and cooperative forms of the establishment of consensus. But how can we explain the fact that Obama received a long and enthusiastic standing ovation after pronouncing the closing tricolon: *health care reform cannot wait, it must not wait, and it will not wait another year?* This *emotional outburst*, as one would have to describe it after watching the video, is not only due to the fact that a certain ritual of applause has become a convention, nor to Obama's delivery. Here he makes use of, albeit quiet and unobtrusive,⁴⁵ emotional pronunciation and intonation as well as his facial expressions and gestures.⁴⁶

burn politics of the past twenty years. Obama, in short, defined political leadership, especially as the economy worsened, as requiring a national convocation of all parties and all ideologies to get the nation back on track. Since the election, Obama has started the convoking. He has enlisted former rivals to join his Cabinet”.

⁴⁴ Cf. also his book *The Audacity of Hope*, where he mentions the health care system several times and also sharply criticizes the policy of his predecessor in this field (esp. Obama, 2008:212ff. & 291ff.).

⁴⁵ Alain L. Sanders justly describes this style as a combination of “cool steadiness and calm resolution—two traits which many believe were decisive to his election victory in these troubled times” [<http://bit.ly/izKclv>].

⁴⁶ Concerning the video cf. note 41. According to Collins (2009:1-2) a former speechwriter for Tony Blair, Obama's voice has a “seductive power”. A kind of “musical power” is “always there in the way Obama hits the important word in each sentence. You get the argument just by listening to the words he puts aurally in bold. It is there also in the way he lets a consonant slide, to lengthen the sound and hold the sentence. It is more like preaching, which, in turn, is like singing”. The detailed study which would be needed of these phenomena would also have to take into account Obama's (self-)pre-sentation through the mass media, but it is not possible here, since it would be well beyond the scope of this article.

This emotional outburst is certainly also due to the fact that an elaborate and artful discourse produces pleasure and enjoyment—a conviction deeply rooted in rhetoric.⁴⁷ The essential point seems to be, however, that Obama’s speech is able to convey precisely what he had repeatedly announced: *hope, confidence* even, that he *can* realize his project. He expressed this in a condensed form in his *Iowa Caucus Night Remarks* of January 3, 2008:

Hope, hope is what led me here today with a father from Kenya; a mother from Kansas; and a story that could only happen in the United States of America. Hope is the bedrock of this nation; the belief that our destiny will not be written for us, but by us; by all those men and women who are not content to settle for the world as it is; who have the courage to remake the world as it should be [<http://bit.ly/l0mpNB>].

This *Change. We Can Believe in*⁴⁸ has been made explicit in various speeches and above all in his book *The Audacity of Hope* (first published in 2006) on a more general and fundamental level. He had already formulated this idea in programmatic form in his maiden speech at the *2004 Democratic convention Key Note Address* of July 27, 2004:

John Kerry calls on us to hope. John Edwards calls on us to hope. I’m not talking about blind optimism here—the almost willful ignorance that thinks unemployment will go away if we just don’t think about it, or the health care crisis will solve itself if we just ignore it. That’s not what I’m talking about. I’m talking about something more substantial. It’s the hope of slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs; the hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores; the hope of a young naval lieutenant bravely patrolling the Mekong Delta; the hope of a millworker’s son who dares to defy the odds; the hope of a skinny kid with a funny name who believes that America has a place for him, too. Hope—Hope in the face of difficulty. Hope in the face of uncertainty. The audacity of hope! (Obama, 2004).

⁴⁷ Cf. for example Peacham (1593): figures or schemata are “forms of speaking, which do take away the wearisomnesse of our common speech, and do fashion a pleasant, sharpe, and evident kind of expressing our meaning; which by the artificiall forme doth give unto matters great strength, perspicuity and grace”.

⁴⁸ This is also the title of a collection of speeches published in Obama (2008a).

In the election itself he focused on economic and social concerns, where –fully in line with traditional rhetoric– he used an abundance of concrete examples of everyday problems⁴⁹ not to show his empathy but to enhance his credibility. Bubenhofer *et al.* (2009) in their broadly based “Semantic Matrix Analysis”, which is based solely on frequency analyses of words used by McCain and Obama, come to the following assessment:

By discussing [...] economic concerns at length, Obama was able to present himself as being tuned into the burning economic and social problems of the American middle-class, which, in turn, allowed him to create a reservoir of empathy and emotional connection with this large swath of the electorate.⁵⁰

The synthesis of ethos and “rational” pathos: empathy and hope

Empathy—that is the word used most frequently after hope to express Obama’s feelings towards his public as well as his voters towards him. And when Obama touches upon social injustice, then he never expresses pity, but indignation; and in revealing political errors or misdeeds of the Bush administration he does not arouse anger or rage, but indignation. Equally foreign to him are “direct and warm” feelings, such as spontaneous affection or disgust—in short he expresses and arouses higher level emotions.⁵¹ This is fully in accordance

⁴⁹ Obama also made extensive use of the internet: in a 30-minute infomercial “American Stories, American Solutions: 30 Minute Special” he shows in a comprehensive and empathic way, using the example of four ordinary American families, people’s grave problems and anxieties about their economic future [<http://bit.ly/kxClxC>].

⁵⁰ Cf. the conclusion in Bubenhofer *et al.* (2009); “The Obama campaign used the ad not only to present its candidate’s far-reaching economic program, but also to pinpoint how his policy proposals would affect Americans on a personal level by examining the experiences and expectations of a cross-country sampling of individuals and families. As a result, in talking about the economy, Obama managed to be rhetorically more complex, while also using language that was more empathetic than that of his Republican opponent”.

⁵¹ For instance *indignation* is a higher and more rational emotion because it is aroused both in case of undeserved misfortune as well as undeserved fortune; *pity* on the other hand is a lower more physical or corporeal emotion, because it is only aroused in cases of undeserved misfortune (Eggs, 2000).

with his theory of hope. Aristotle does not deal systematically with *hope*, but one can conclude from his remarks in his *Rhetoric* and his *Nicomachean Ethics* that he considers it to be an ethical disposition, in other words in the sense of “hopeful disposition” or “sanguine temperament”.⁵²

The coward [...] is a despairing sort of person; for he fears everything. The brave man, on the other hand, has the opposite disposition; for confidence is the mark of a hopeful disposition (a sanguine temperament) (Aristotle, NE:II:2:11:1116a).⁵³

The coward is [...] a despondent person, being afraid of everything; but the courageous man is just the opposite, for confidence belongs to a sanguine temperament (Aristotle, NE:1116a:4).

From this it follows that if one has a sanguine temperament, then he or she will be confident, but the converse does not follow that the person who actually has feelings of confidence also possesses a sanguine temperament.

In Christianity, especially since Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), *Hope* in addition to *Faith* and *Love* has been considered to be an essential Christian virtue, in other words a valuable ethical disposition. It is only since the Renaissance that *hope* has been increasingly treated as a *passion*. The most important definition for the English-speaking world is to be found in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*:

These simple passions called appetite, desire, love, aversion, hate, joy, and grief have their names for diverse considerations diversified. At first, when they one

⁵² Cf. on the other hand the study by Gravlee (2000), who leaves the question open as to whether hope is an emotion or an ethical disposition (virtue). He does, however, see that hope is “higher level” than confidence: “it seems plausible to suggest that good hope may concern either the distant or the proximate, while confidence (whether as the appropriate foundation for courage or not) is restricted to events that appear imminent” (467). Put in linguistic terms the difference is easy to grasp: dispositional concepts like *brave*, *choleric*, or *hopeful* are theories about the probable behavior of people in certain situations (“if x is brave, he will behave in situation S in such and such a way”). That is why they can also be negated: *He is choleric, but astonishingly, (in this situation) he is not choleric*. That is not possible with emotion concepts: **He is furious, but, astonishingly, he is not furious*.

⁵³ The translation is by Ross (Aristotle, 1908); Rackham (Aristotle, 1934) translates with *sanguine temperament*.

succeed another, they are diversely called from the opinion men have of the likelihood of attaining what they desire. Secondly, from the object loved or hated. Thirdly, from the consideration of many of them together. Fourthly, from the alteration or succession itself. For appetite with an opinion of attaining is called hope. The same, without such opinion, despair. Aversion, with opinion of hurt from the object, fear. The same, with hope of avoiding that hurt by resistance, courage. Sudden courage, anger. Constant hope, confidence of ourselves (Hobbes, 1651:34-35).

If we adopt Hobbes' definition of hope: *appetite (or aspiration) with an opinion of attaining*,⁵⁴ then Obama's view of hope can be defined pretty accurately: it is an appetite for a *good* life based on a *rationally* grounded or reasonable opinion or theory. Now, on one hand, rationally based hope is not part of the *audacity* in Obama's programmatic slogan *the Audacity of Hope*, since audacity can be linked with rash *adventurousness*; but, on the other hand, audacity is related to *courage* and *fearlessness*, and above all to *enterprise* (in the sense of *adventure* and *undertaking*). This way, Obama's slogan addresses not only essential values of the United States, but also serves to dissociate him from Bush. The American virtues include not only courage and enterprise based on balanced judgment, but also a "dash" of *adventurousness* which makes the seemingly impossible possible:⁵⁵ In the U.S. is it not possible for someone to rise from dishwasher to millionaire? And is not Obama himself an example of this *American dream*?⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Thus we are not adopting Hobbes' view that hope is a passion, which is why we have added the more abstract "aspiration".

⁵⁵ Cf. the core values enumerated by Obama in his book *The Audacity of Hope*: "The values of self-reliance and self-improvement and risk-taking. The values of drive, discipline, temperance, and hard work. The values of thrift and personal responsibility. The values of equal opportunity and nondiscrimination complement rather than impinge on our liberty" (Obama, 2008:54-55).

⁵⁶ Cf. also his speech at the *2004 Democratic convention*: "Tonight is a particular honor for me because, let's face it, my presence on this stage is pretty unlikely. My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya. He grew up herding goats, went to school in a tin-roof shack. His father—my grandfather—was a cook, a domestic servant to the British. But my grandfather had larger dreams for his son. Through hard work and perseverance my father got a scholarship to study in a magical place, America, that shone as a beacon of freedom and opportunity to so many who had come before" (Obama, 2004).

More importantly, however, the catchword *The Audacity of Hope* is used to dissociate him from Bush. For Aristotle as well as for Hobbes, confidence goes hand in hand with hope: *constant hope, confidence of ourselves*. This is exactly what Obama is trying to convey to his fellow citizens. This also means that they can and must take their destiny into their own hands, as far as this is objectively possible. With Bush, however, confidence arises from the feeling that the President and his team can ward off the threat posed by international terrorism. This *savior structure* means, however, that *fear* is necessarily concomitant with confidence. That is why Bush was only able to persuade the American voter for as long as he could plausibly sell the threat scenario. But fear based on confidence has had and still has a much worse effect: the readiness of the Bush Administration and also of many Americans to repel the supposedly imminent threat by transgressing boundaries (excessive controls, war, torture) –this has been shown by Terror Management Theory.

Obama's Christianity

Finally, we still need to deal with the reference to the Christian religion associated with *The Audacity of Hope*. Obama realized early on that the Democrats could only win against the Republicans, the “Christian party”, if they themselves open up to Christianity. He emphasized this already in the *Key Note Address* of 2004:

The pundits, the pundits like to slice-and-dice our country into Red States and Blue States; Red States for Republicans, Blue States for Democrats. But I've got news for them, too. We worship an “awesome God” in the Blue States, and we don't like federal agents poking around in our libraries in the Red States. We coach Little League in the Blue States and yes, we've got some gay friends in the Red States. There are patriots who opposed the war in Iraq and there are patriots who supported the war in Iraq. We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes, all of us defending the United States of America (Obama, 2004).

He pursues this thought in greater depth in the chapter entitled “Faith” in his book *The Audacity of Hope*:

It is a truism that we Americans are a religious people. According to the most recent surveys, 95% of Americans believe in God, more than two-thirds belong to a church, 37% call themselves committed Christians, and substantially more people believe in angels than believe in evolution [...] Our President routinely remarks on how Christ changed his heart, and football players point to the heavens after every touchdown, as if God were calling plays from the celestial sidelines (Obama, 2008:235).

[...] Today, white evangelical Christians (along with conservative Catholics) are the heart and soul of the Republican Party's grassroots base—a core following continually mobilized by a network of pulpits and media outlets that technology has only amplified. It is their issue—abortion, gay marriage, prayer in schools, intelligent design [...] The single biggest gap in party affiliation among white Americans is not between men and women, or between those who reside in so-called red states and those who reside in blue states, but between those who attend church regularly and those who don't. Democrats, meanwhile, are scrambling to “get religion” (Obama, 2008:238).⁵⁷

In this book Obama also describes how he became a Christian in Chicago where he had been working (from 1985 on) as a community organizer for the Development Communities Project of a Christian Organization and was baptized in 1988. The crucial factor for him was the African American religious tradition, especially because “in the black community [...] the sins of those who came to church were not so different from the sins of those who didn't, and so were as likely to be talked about with humor as with condemnation. You needed to come to church precisely because you were of this world, not apart from it; rich, poor, sinner, saved, you needed to embrace Christ precisely because you had sins to wash away—because you were human”.

It was because of these newfound understandings—that religious commitment did not require me to suspend critical thinking, disengage from the battle for economic and social justice, or otherwise retreat from the world that I knew and loved—that I was finally able to walk down the aisle of Trinity United Church of Christ one day and be baptized. *It came about as a choice and not an epiphany*; the questions I had did not magically disappear. But kneeling beneath the cross on the South Side of Chicago, *I felt God's spirit beckoning*

⁵⁷ Excerpts from this chapter can be found at [<http://ti.me/jkSE25>].

me. I submitted myself to His will, and dedicated myself to discovering His truth (Obama, 2008:246).

He has described and embellished the day on which he was baptized again and again using virtually identical wording, e.g. in Hartford in June 2007:

So one Sunday, I put on one of the few clean jackets I had, and went over to Trinity United Church of Christ on 95th Street on the South Side of Chicago. And I heard Reverend Jeremiah A. Wright deliver a sermon called “The Audacity of Hope”. And during the course of that sermon, he introduced me to someone named Jesus Christ. I learned that my sins could be redeemed. I learned that those things I was too weak to accomplish myself, He would accomplish with me if I placed my trust in Him. *And in time, I came to see faith as more than just a comfort to the weary or a hedge against death, but rather as an active, palpable agent in the world and in my own life* [<http://bit.ly/13rZkB>].

This account has often been described as Obama’s conversion narrative and equated with Bush’s narrative. Apart from the fact that it is not a conversion, this equating of the two narratives obscures the essential difference between them, a difference that is marked by the polyphonic remark: *It came about as a choice and not an epiphany*—Obama was not chosen by God, but chose Christian baptism of his own volition and after deliberation. It was not an epiphany, but rather a beckoning from God. It is not God who reveals his truth, it is Obama who dedicates himself to discovering God’s truth.

It is these remarks in particular that have confused many conservative Christians and even outraged them, or even earned him the accusation of Messianism.⁵⁸ Indeed, many believers wonder: *Obama’s Christianity: is it sincere?*, when they are confronted with the following basic statement from Obama:

What our deliberative, pluralistic democracy demands is that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-

⁵⁸ Cf. Eamon Javers (2009), “Obama invokes Jesus more than Bush”, in: *Politico*, June 22, 2009 [<http://bit.ly/m4qSDB>] on the occasion of an Obama speech at the University of Notre Dame on May 17, 2009 [<http://1.usa.gov/ld5RNr>]. This speech, in which Obama repeats the positions he has held since 2004, unleashed—astonishingly enough—a storm of indignation.

specific, values. It requires that their proposals must be subject to argument and amenable to reason (Obama, 2008:259).

This allows us to determine precisely the essential difference between Bush and Obama in their relationship to religion and the resulting differences in the way that emotions are produced in their political discourse. Michael S. Winters is right in emphasizing that American religious life is determined by two distinctive conceptions: “churches which have priests and follow the common lectionary—Catholics, Episcopalians (Anglicans) and Lutherans; and the evangelical churches where the preacher chooses his texts, usually Pauline epistles or readings from the Hebrew Scriptures” (Winters, 2009:1). Bush, who has the rhetoric and the style of an evangelical preacher, belongs to the second group. Obama, on the contrary, stands in the tradition of a specific American political rhetoric which is “a combination of Enlightenment liberalism with mainstream Christianity” (Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt). According to Winters, Obama’s style is “ecclesiastical” and has three components: “to convoke, to teach and to preside” (2).

We have shown that the first component represents a breach with traditional deliberative speech (including American political rhetoric); the third component—to preside—follows of course from the office itself, but the varied forms of communication which Obama cultivates and stage-manages in public, the mass media and the electronic media are much too complex for them to be attributable to an enlightened presiding. The second component is incorrect, as I hope we have shown: Obama does not teach, but argues. His argumentation is not didactic but deliberative; he does not require agreement, but disagreement, to find the best consensual solution; his reasoning is not only fact oriented, but above all value oriented. This is why his discourse is “also always” ethical and equitable.

Because he relies on individual initiative, audacity and enterprise, he can convey the hope of a better society, which he expresses with sincere empathy, to his listeners as well. And since he knows how to justify the necessary goals with *logos* and expertise, hope becomes firm certainty and *confidence* for many in his audience. And since this confidence does not just rely on individual initiative but on solidarity and corporate feeling, Obama has aroused *enthusiasm* with his non-American audience. With the American public this enthusiasm will be even greater, since Obama wants—with his “Thoughts on Reclaiming the

American Dream”, as the subtitle of *The Audacity of Hope* says— to make a more perfect America. This is what he also said in his speech at the University of Notre Dame on May 7, 2009:

knowledge should give us faith that through our collective labor, and God’s providence, and our willingness to shoulder each other’s burdens, America will continue on its precious journey towards that more perfect union (Obama, 2009).

The question remains as to whether this way is compatible with the interests of other states. It is also doubtful whether the necessity to maintain America’s integrity and power so that it can continue to play the part of a global player will not result in the audacity of hope becoming a patriotic routine.

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