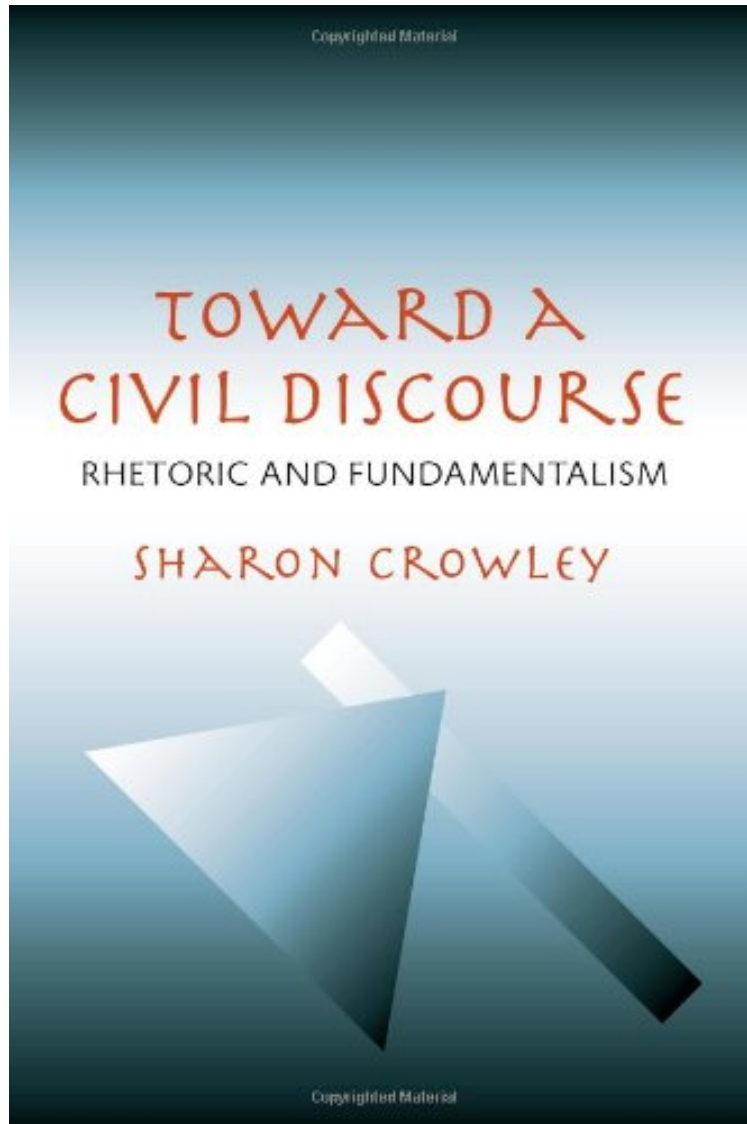


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Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism (Pitt Comp Literacy Culture)

Sharon Crowley

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before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism (Pitt Comp Literacy Culture):

10 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Nicely grounded, well researched bookBy Cyranothe2ndI recently read this book to use in my own research into the topic of the rhetoric of religion and found it to be engaging, well

researched and fair. Crowley is careful not to equate fundamentalists with all Christians or all political conservatives. Her thesis is that rational argumentation, which has been embraced as the best form of reasoning since the Enlightenment, is not helpful in dealing with fundamentalists because they have deeply personal and emotional reasons for believing. Crowley thinks that rhetorical argumentation (with a dose of pathos) might be helpful because it may carve out common ground between Christian fundamentalists and 'liberals'. The word 'liberals' is problematic because of its misuse in American politics. When Crowley uses it she means those people who adhere to the ideas of the Enlightenment--life, liberty, personal rights, etc. She does not mean politically left or Democratic. However, this could have been better stated in the text. As it is, this point can get lost and Crowley's argument can be misconstrued as a political, rather than a social, one. Second, I think that Crowley's thesis is a bit naive. As a former fundamentalist, I think it takes more than rhetorical argument to sway a believer. If one really believes that one is 'saved' and that the person you are arguing with is blinded by Satan, there is no argument that that person can make that can trump the authority of the Bible and the church. Crowley seems to concede this point in the last chapter, when she says that the best people to find common ground with are disaffected outliers who may be ready to leave the church anyway. But I wish that she had spent some time on what causes a person to leave the church and how rhetorical arguments sway them afterward. This is an important field of research and I hope that Crowley continues to pursue it. I eagerly look forward to her next book on the subject.

19 of 23 people found the following review helpful. The Uses and Limits of 'Toward a Civil Discourse' By Michael CI recently had to read this text for a Rhetoric class at Cal State Chico, and found it to be a frustratingly brilliant work. Brilliant because, on the one hand, her argument and points are exceptionally timely and accurate. Frustrating because on the other, her arguments fail her own critical method. She advocates an ideologic criticism, a method of extending rhetoric beyond logic and empiricism and utilizing rhetorical methods of emotion and belief to better address modern day issues. Her treatment of ideologies, and how they are woven together, is superb, and the rhetorical strategy she offers for untangling a belief from its ideology so that it can be challenged without threatening the whole system, should be readily employed. However, when I'm reading these academic works, something I've naturally come to do during my reading is to apply the text's rhetoric to itself. Can Crowley stand up to an ideologic criticism? I wrote an entire paper for the class dealing with the subject, and while I won't bore the reader with it here, suffice to say that I drew the conclusion she is unable to disarticulate her own ideology. The text claims to be a means of finding common ground between fundamentalism and liberalism, but it is hardly that. I cannot imagine any fundamentalist finding a place to stand in reading this text. She degrades their positions and beliefs at every opportunity, and hails liberalism as the obvious better. Rather than attempting to create a civil discourse, Crowley's work is designed to create better liberal rhetoricians, to provide tools to figure out how to break down fundamentalist belief systems. In other words, it's a campaign manual to turn the social tides. The only "common ground" she's after is total conquest. This is a shame, because it reveals how fundamentalist her own liberal ideology is. It shows how she is unaware of the untenable articulations between her own beliefs. And because of the offensive nature of her writing, what otherwise could have been the rhetorical text of the ages becomes exclusive and polemical. Her attempt was to renew public discourse. But through the extremist nature of her writing, I'm afraid she will only further solidify people in their already held positions: the fundamentalists will hate her, and the liberals will praise her. How does that get us anywhere? If only she could have realized her own deeply entrenched ideologic, and allowed for greater objectivity in her work. Still, her conclusions and ideas about how belief systems are built and can be dismantled is priceless, and worth the read.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Fundamentalism often blocks productive discourse. And now, we so badly need to respect, hear and engage in rhetoric. By Kathy Baldock/Canyonwalker An interesting book to read at an incredibly polarized time in US elections. I found it useful to understand what "rhetoric" actually is because, like so many, I have adapted the modern use of the word (sentence, grammar, thoughts). Crowley presents well the core problem with fundamentalists' ability to engage in productive rhetoric. I came out of that tradition of "knowing" the irrefutable truth that was non-negotiable. Rhetoric demands that we begin on some point we can agree on and then elevate the exchange without anger, violence or threats to a new level of discovery where both sides are heard and a progressive outcome might be achieved. When one side refuses to be open to new possibilities, no rhetoric can emerge. I do see the conservative fundamentalist discourse, or actually lack of it, devolve into stereotyping, scapegoating, demonizing and self-victimization. HOW do you drag a person OUT of that to engage in productive conversation? I would have liked more tips on that, yet it is complex and even impossible in some circumstances. Finding a commonality and relational meeting point may be our only hope. The "liberal" POV, with the meaning of liberal in the classic rhetoric language and position, focuses on individual rights, equality in the law, personal freedoms, tolerance, privacy and rule of law. This position is necessary in a democracy. Because fundamentalism does not allow for questioning or breaking from authority, it stymies or completely shuts out the conversations necessary for democracy. Again, I would have loved tips, but you can't make someone engage in exchanges if they are SURE they are right and all other POV are evil, ill-informed, destructive to family, country and God. A great companion to the book is the newly published *The End of White Christian America*. Fundamentalism when it merged with conservative politics in the 1970s has sunk both ships. We may be in need of another Age of Enlightenment. To dispel any thought that I may be a liberal, anti-God, anti-Christian person, I am NOT. I am an

evangelical Christian who, through social justice work of inclusion for LGBT Christians in conservative faith environments, has eschewed the chains of what I was told to think. I have escaped the authoritarian non-negotiable trap and began to research and think outside the doctrine of my tribe. The result is my own book from a progressive viewpoint (*Walking the Bridgeless Canyon: Repairing the Breach Between the Church and the LGBT Community*). I read this book to help me better engage fundamentalists for inclusion and equality and the task is daunting, if not impossible for some deeply entrenched believers. My take away is: there are solid reasons why this work is so tough and much of the opposition is unintentional, it just IS. I need to be able to do a good job of assessing where my efforts are best invested and work there. As to the others, I can remain gracious better understanding how trapped people are in their refusal to engage in productive discourse. We are in for a very bumpy ride as a nation if we will not learn to be respectful, listen and engage in productive conversations.

Toward a Civil Discourse examines how, in the current political climate, Americans find it difficult to discuss civic issues frankly and openly with one another. Because America is dominated by two powerful discourses--liberalism and Christian fundamentalism, each of which paints a very different picture of America and its citizens' responsibilities toward their country--there is little common ground, and hence Americans avoid disagreement for fear of giving offence. Sharon Crowley considers the ancient art of rhetoric as a solution to the problems of repetition and condemnation that pervade American public discourse. Crowley recalls the historic rhetorical concept of stasis--where advocates in a debate agree upon the point on which they disagree, thereby recognizing their opponent as a person with a viable position or belief. Most contemporary arguments do not reach stasis, and without it, Crowley states, a nonviolent resolution cannot occur. *Toward a Civil Discourse* investigates the cultural factors that lead to the formation of beliefs, and how beliefs can develop into densely articulated systems and political activism. Crowley asserts that rhetorical invention (which includes appeals to values and the passions) is superior in some cases to liberal argument (which often limits its appeals to empirical fact and reasoning) in mediating disagreements where participants are primarily motivated by a moral or passionate commitment to beliefs. Sharon Crowley examines numerous current issues and opposing views, and discusses the consequences to society when, more often than not, argumentative exchange does not occur. She underscores the urgency of developing a civil discourse, and through a review of historic rhetoric and its modern application, provides a foundation for such a discourse--whose ultimate goal, in the tradition of the ancients, is democratic discussion of civic issues.

A remarkable examination of affective citizenships expansions and contractions. . . . An excellent study of the fundamentalist rhetoric that is gaining such powerful influence in American culture, [reaffirms] the power of rhetoric within the civic sphere.--JAC