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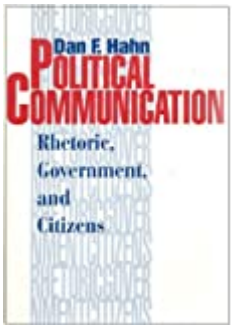

Dan F. Hahn. *Political Communication: Rhetoric, Government, and Citizens.* State College, Penn.: Strata Publishing, 1988. xiii + 289 pp. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-9634489-3-4.

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In the aftermath of President William Jefferson Clinton's impeachment trial, pollsters, politicians, and pundits are now focusing on the Y2K election. Dan F. Hahn's book, *Political Communication: Rhetoric, Government, and Citizens*, offers students an opportunity to logically analyze the political rhetoric offered during election years as well as the political rhetoric appearing in newspapers, on television and on radio.

This textbook, which deservedly earned Hahn the Everett Lee Hunt Award from the Eastern Communication Association, covers a variety of suggestions on ways to analyze politics. He addresses ways of looking at American political ideology, ideology and the media, sexual language and politics, the use of language in politics, and political campaigns. He also writes about myths and metaphors; secrecy, surveillance and lies; and the effects of the media on voters as well as politicians.

Hahn, who has written and spoken widely about the "social conversation that is politics," provides readers with ways to analyze various aspects of how to go about analyzing political rhetoric.

Throughout the text, Hahn argues that the basic issues of politics center around a single question: "How much freedom versus how much order? For example, while Hahn notes that while "liberals believe in freedom in the civil-rights arena," conservatives "believe in order in the civil-rights arena"; and while liberals "believe in order in the economic arena," conservatives "believe in freedom in the economic arena" (p. 5). Although it seems a bit simplistic, I find that it is a useful framework for analyzing politics and political issues such as school choice, where conservatives argue for the freedom to choose schools for their children through a publicly funded voucher program while liberals want more money to finance improvements in the public school system rather than offering school choice through vouchers.

The book also offers concrete ideas about how to be more rigorous in analyzing the rhetoric of politicians. An example that comes to my mind is Ronald Reagan's promise in his 1980 Inaugural Address that it was "morning in America." It is an example of brilliant rhetoric; it is a phrase that is easy to recall even two decades later. But what does it really tell us?

Or, more recently, take William Jefferson Clinton, who promised the American people that he would help lead them to "build a bridge to the 21st Century." A great idea, I think, but how can one come to understand that both Reagan and Clinton offered metaphors to appeal to what Hahn describes as another political metaphor, "the *body* politic," rather than spending more time on talking about more specific examples about how social change

could occur?

Among the most interesting chapters in the book are those dealing with the use of language in political communication. For example, Chapter Eight deals with sexual language and political rhetoric (pp. 133-63) and how political communication reinforces binary categories such as masculine and feminine. As Hahn notes, these binary categories include "male versus female, rationality versus emotionality, activity versus passivity, hard versus soft, war versus peace–with all the characteristics we associate with maleness on one side and those associated with femaleness on the other" (p. 135). Such binary language, Hahn argues, is stacked in favor of men, particularly in the public sphere of politics.

Then in Chapter Nine (pp. 165-89), Hahn continues the discussion through his analysis of the marriage metaphor in politics. Among other sources (his bibliographies accompanying each chapter are of very high quality), Hahn draws upon the work of Anne Wilson Schaef and her book *Escape from Intimacy: The Pseudo-Relationship Addictions* (New York: Harper and Row, 1991). He condenses Schaef's work to three broad categories: the establishment of "instant intimacy" through sharing secrets and displays of empathy, through fostering mutual dependency through the enactment of the role of savior, and through privileging intimate relationship "through denying needs and other facets of life for the relationship's sake" (p. 166).

Hahn offers good examples of how the marriage metaphor works, and it is easy to find examples in the rhetoric of presidential hopeful during this campaign season.

Hillary Clinton, in her July 8 visit to New York in her campaign for a seat in the U.S. Senate, uses the language of instant intimacy: "I intend to be spending my time in the next days and weeks and months listening to New Yorkers. Now I suppose the question on everybody's mind is, 'Why the Senate and why New York and why me?' All I can say is I care deeply about the issues that are important in this state, that I've been already learning about and hearing about" (Adam Nagourney, New York Times News Service, "Listening to New Yorkers: Contours of a Candidacy for Mrs. Clinton," *International Herald Tribune*, page 3, July 9, 1999). Such is the language of intimacy for a candidate who has never lived in New York.

The final chapters address issues relating to the effects of mediated campaigns on voters as well as politicians. As for voters, Hahn writes of the shallowness of television, and of the decreasing amount of time given to candidates (five-to-twenty-second sound bites) that viewer-voters are expected to find of significant value in making sense of the candidates when they go to the polls on Election Day.

Politicians, in turn, have their own burdens: raising more and more money, which Hahn notes forces candidates to spend more time raising money and "thereby makes them vulnerable to major contributors"; dealing with increased scrutiny on the personal lives of politicians, which "puts enormous stress on politicians' personal and family lives"; and the focus on intraparty squabbles of primary candidates, making "it more difficult for politicians to shore up their intraparty base before engaging with their opponents in the General Elections" (p. 209).

Overall, *Political Communication: Rhetoric, Government, and Citizens* is a book that that is intelligently written, easily accessible, and very readable. It is an excellent text and resource for college courses focusing on rhetoric, political science, journalism, or communication.

This review was commissioned for H-Pol by Lex Renda <renlex@uwm.edu>

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