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**Assigned Reading:** Burke, Kenneth. Selections of Consubstantiality.

### **Identification is Metaphor**

In the selections on consubstantiality from *Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke explains the act of persuasion in terms of identification. Identification is the method of giving presence to the similarities and differences of the substance of a person or a principle. Persuasion, according to Burke, is dependent on the willingness of the audience to accept the identification between the speaker and itself (46). **Identification functions as a metaphor by comparing two seemingly distinct things to create new understanding.**

Identification creates a “comparative culture” through which we are able to understand things in a new light (40). **In the same way that metaphors allow us to understand unfamiliar concepts by comparing them to things we already recognize, identification allows us to understand people through what we know and believe.** This understanding of other people creates a construction of reality, because through understanding the people around us, individuals strive to follow the “communicative norms that match the cooperative ways of [their] society” (39). The connection between individuals also leads to persuasion, as a speaker can use identification to “establish rapport between himself and his audience” (46).

The comparison of another to the self does not prevent us from understanding things through identification, however, because through identification we are “at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another” (21). Burke says that identification inevitably leads to division, “since opponents can join battle only through a mediatory ground” (25). This

mediatory ground is what is highlighted in identification; it is the understanding meant to be gained from the metaphor. **Because we are distinct through identification, however, we see what is highlighted and what is hidden based on our personal experience.** Identification does not force us to accept a single comparison, but provides a metaphor that can be expanded or reversed because we hold autonomy over our identity.

Identification holds a role not only in persuasion, but in *recognizing* persuasion, by its ability to “prove opposites” (44). According to Burke, proving opposites occurs when we recognize “obvious rhetorical intent” in a piece (44). Once we recognize the intention, we are able to reverse that intention and question the controversy presented. Identification is a key part of proving opposites because our ability to question the rhetoric presented to us is dependent on the fact that identification implies division (23). Similarly, once we recognize the presence of a metaphorical concept in our reality, we can reverse and expand the metaphor to question how well it works within our reality. **In using metaphors and identification to prove opposites, we must be conscious of not only what is being given presence, but what is being hidden.**

Identification, like metaphors, gives us new understandings of reality through comparison of two seemingly unrelated things. Identification and metaphors can be recognized and understood themselves when we recognize the network of metaphors or “body of identifications” that make up our understanding of the world around us (26). **Identification leads to persuasion, but by recognizing identification, we can maintain a distinct identity and recognize the division that is implicit in identification.**

### **Bibliography**

Burke, Kenneth. *Rhetoric of Motives*. University of California Press, 1969, Berkeley.

