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The Humanist Scholar as Public Expert

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Although the rhetoric of expertise stemming from the hard and social sciences has been well researched, the scholarship has not tended to focus on acts of public expertise by scholars from the humanities. This article reports a case study in the rhetorical practices of a theologian, acting as a public expert, first attempting to affect decision making in the Waco conflict in 1993 and then attempting to participate in and shape the public debates that followed it. To compare the practices of this humanities scholar to expectations from research on the rhetoric of expertise, a rhetorical analysis was conducted on the context, style, genre, and argument in the scholar's public writings. This article discusses (a) the role of *kairos* in the policy cycle in determining the scholar's bids for acceptance as an expert, (b) the use of narrative as a generic hybrid of intra- and interdisciplinary practice, and (c) the role of "understanding" as a special topic.

Keywords: *rhetorical analysis; kairos; public policy argument; expertise*

Studying the Humanities Scholar as Public Expert

Research in public policy has described the growth of an industry of expertise (Fischer, 1990, 1993; Rich, 2004; Rich & Weaver, 1998, 2000; J. Walker, 1991). When considered broadly, from think tanks to individual analysis and commentary, public expertise has become a significant professional activity and a staple of public debate. Research on the rhetoric of expert discourse has tended to focus on scholars from the hard and social sciences (cf. Lyne & Howe, 1990; McCloskey, 1985, 1993; Miller, 2003, 2004; Taylor, 1992). This manifests itself in a number of ways: Those debates in which expertise is acknowledged as playing a significant role are called technical debates; the product of expertise is typically termed as facts or as knowledge. Because of this focus, research on the rhetoric of expertise sometimes draws from scholarship in the rhetoric of science and the rhetoric of social science to study the rhetorical construction of expert knowledge from those disciplines (cf. Lyne & Howe, 1990; McCloskey, 1993; Waddell, 1990).

There are, of course, good reasons for this focus on scientists and social scientists as public experts. Most recognized public experts have home disciplines in the hard and social sciences; however, scholars from the humanities do sometimes act as public experts, and they have good motives for doing so. In addition to any desire they may have to contribute to public deliberation, the professional activity of acting as a public expert may contribute to cases for promotion and tenure. These practices warrant research focused on humanities scholars as public experts.

To study the practices of a scholar from the humanities acting as a public expert, I have analyzed the rhetorical practices of James Tabor during and following the Waco catastrophe of 1993. Tabor, a theologian at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, has enjoyed success as a public expert for more than a decade, both for his expertise on millennial and apocryphal new religious movements and for his scholarship on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Tabor's work at Waco was in part collaborative with other scholars, but singling out his efforts provides a focus among the practices of experts and would-be experts at Waco and can serve as an example of the humanities scholar as public expert.

A Rhetorical Analysis of Expertise

Having identified a tendency in the literature to neglect scholars from the humanities as exemplars of public expertise, this article argues that the practices of humanities scholars as public experts warrant a research focus. This study of one case illustrates the rhetorical practices of a humanities scholar as public expert both to identify successes and to consider those rhetorical practices within a framework of scholarship on expertise and public deliberation. Studies in policy communication and expertise often describe a market economy of technical, knowledge-producing expertise as the context of experts' rhetorical practices. That account, however, takes scientific and social scientific expertise as its paradigm. Policy studies research tends to define expertise in such a way as to presume technical expertise. Expertise is often defined in terms of generating facts; advocacy is defined in terms of debating values. These types of dualities—facts versus values, analysis versus commentary, expert versus advocate—have been problematized (Fischer, 1990; Lyne & Howe, 1990; Rein, 1976; Turner, 2001) but clearly still persist within research paradigms. Frankena (1992), for example, writes on the necessity of technical expertise, "Technical expertise is now widely recognized as the only way to challenge controversial decisions, whatever the motivating political or moral values" (p. 183).

Part of the upshot of this lingering, if artificial, duality is that expectations for expertise privilege or assume practices of technical expertise or expertise that produces what may be recognizable as factual knowledge. Benveniste (1977) argues that the expert produces a commodity and that that commodity is knowledge: "Experts deal in a scarce commodity: knowledge, which includes not only the knowledge to which they have access, i.e. their expertise, but more importantly, the information they obtain and generate" (p. 145). In two studies of expertise, Miller (2003, 2004) discusses how factual knowledge is perceived as the product of the expert and how it is produced in different situations (2003) or how it is modeled within computerized expert systems (2004). In both cases, factual knowledge is viewed as the commodity an expert produces.

If the analytic model of expertise tends to presume technical expertise (likely both following and reinforcing a similar public perception), how does the humanities scholar as expert produce the expected commodity of factual knowledge? As Miller has shown (2003), some social science practices share the difficulties of presenting nonquantifiable findings as factual knowledge. This difficulty would seem to be all the more acute for the humanities scholar. To what extent does the expert from the humanities produce a recognizable commodity analogous to the factual knowledge that is the commodity of the technical expert?

Texts and Methods

In this study, I conduct a rhetorical analysis of Tabor's most significant written work as an expert on the conflict outside Waco, Texas, in 1993. I analyze three of Tabor's (1994, 1995; Tabor & Gallagher, 1995) written works, each of which was written for both intra- and interdisciplinary audiences. The analysis highlights particularly the first chapter of the book *Why Waco?* ("What Might Have Happened," Tabor & Gallagher, 1995), which Tabor presented as his written statement for the congressional hearings on Waco and which has been the most widely referenced and independently distributed of Tabor's publications.

Based on a single case study, this article will not make claims of what humanities scholars do when acting as public experts. That said, this case study discusses practices and raises research questions, following a scholar from the humanities who experienced some qualified successes during a period of a few years. This case is not paradigmatic in the sense that this scholar was famously successful; hopefully, however, the case is rather typi-

cal. The rhetorical analysis of this case identifies the successes of this scholar as public expert and discusses the rhetorical practices by which they were enacted.

Policy studies scholars who focus on the constraints of the market economy of expertise often take what Lyne and Howe (1990) have called a structural approach to studies of expertise. Lyne and Howe write, "We will refer to this as the 'structural' account of expertise, because it emphasizes the systemic influence of disciplines, institutions, and professional practices on the shape of discourse" (p. 134). Lyne and Howe distinguish their studies of scientists engaged in popularization or accommodation as a "'rhetorical' account of expertise," one in which "the expert uses paradigms as strategies rather than as constraints, and becomes as much a rhetorician as a technician" (p. 134). Certainly, other studies in the rhetoric of science also problematize a strict distinction between the rhetor and the technician based on in-discipline and interdisciplinary practice (recent examples include Fahnestock, 2004; Miller, 2003; Paul, 2004). This study will focus on how constraints and individual rhetorical agency may both be in play.

Myers (2003) has argued about the study of scientific popularization, including the study of scientists entering public policy debates:

Textual analysts, like practising scientific writers, need to be prepared for hybridity. So any claim one makes about the use of references, or the hedging, or the illustrations, needs to relate back to what this particular text is doing here, not to assumptions about what texts like this in general must do, and not to broad distinctions between real science and some imitation. (p. 271)

Likewise, the studies of the discourse of humanists entering public debate need to be particularly situated rather than immediately assumed to have a particular generic character. To position Tabor's rhetorical practices in their context, in addition to Tabor's own texts, I reviewed secondary data of the case, including reviews, interviews, other publications by the authors, and a survey of news reporting from the event in 1993 through the end of the 1995 government hearings on the Waco.

Having contextualized Tabor's practices, the study seeks to answer the following questions: How do the practices of this humanist scholar as expert meet the recognized expectation of the rhetorical practices of experts, and how does Tabor meet the expectation that the expert produces a commodity, typically facts or knowledge? To address these questions, this article reports a rhetorical analysis of the context, genre, style, and arguments of these texts.

The Case: James Tabor as Expert on the Waco Catastrophe

On February 28, 1993, agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) attempted to arrest Vernon Howell, aka David Koresh, at the residence of Koresh's religious sect, the Branch Davidians, outside Waco, Texas. The raid failed and the ensuing gunfight killed four ATF officers and six Davidians and injured many on both sides (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 1993). After a ceasefire was arranged, law enforcement jurisdiction was turned over to the FBI, which oversaw a 51-day siege (U.S. Department of Justice, 1993b). The negotiations during that time did yield some results; several adults and children left the Mt. Carmel Center. However, on April 19, when the FBI attempted to drive the Davidians out using a form of tear gas, more than 80 members were still inside. When a fire consumed the building, more than 70 Davidians were killed and only 9 survived (Reavis, 1995; Thibodeau & Whiteson, 1999).

Within days of the ATF's attempted raid on Mt. Carmel outside Waco, two scholars of religion specializing in apocalyptic and millennial new religious movements attempted to advise and intervene in the negotiations between the Davidians and the FBI. They sought to influence the implementation of law enforcement policy at Waco. Their efforts met with little success; although they did communicate briefly with FBI agents, Tabor and Phillip Arnold, then director of the Reunion Institute in Houston, were never formally included in the negotiations, nor were they successful at influencing the FBI's decision making or policy implementation for handling "hostage-barricade" situations. For the most part, law enforcement did not choose to recognize or call on their expertise (Ammerman, 1995; Tabor, 1995, 1994; Tabor & Gallagher, 1995).

Tabor and Arnold's greatest successes during the Waco event came through less direct and less official channels. On April 1, 32 days into the Waco siege, Arnold and Tabor conducted a religious dialogue about the Waco standoff on a radio program they knew the Davidians listened to, directly targeting the Davidians and Koresh in particular as their audience. The FBI later allowed the Davidian's lawyers to take a tape of that dialogue to them. In reports by attorneys and survivors and in surviving texts written by Koresh, it is clear that Tabor and Arnold were successful reaching Koresh and the Davidians.¹ That said, they were not included as experts in government agency decision making.²

Tabor and Arnold's oft-repeated motive for participating in the Waco standoff was to bring about a peaceful end to a difficult situation, offering their particular expertise as the necessary means to facilitate such an outcome. Among the actors within the scene, Tabor and Arnold's approach to

the situation uniquely assumed that the government standoff at Waco could be resolved peacefully because of rather than in spite of the group's religious worldview. Tabor and Arnold's approach assumed the legitimacy, fidelity, and sincerity of the belief system of Koresh and the Branch Davidians, and argued that the system could not only be recreated by experts from outside the Davidian's group (the work Tabor and Arnold were conducting) but could also be used to inform the formal negotiations conducted by the FBI. However, they were never successful at intervening in decision making or implementation of the agencies involved.

Following the outcomes at Waco, Tabor published two book chapters on the Branch Davidians and the Waco siege and one book with a fellow scholar of apocalypticism and millenarianism, Eugene Gallagher³ of Connecticut College, titled *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America* (1995). In these texts, the participation of Tabor and Arnold is represented within a broader narrative of Waco. Tabor and Gallagher, building from and representing the experiences of Tabor and Arnold, discuss Waco as the story of a widely misunderstood new religious movement (NRM) and the social and cultural climate in America that led to its violent demise. The authors simultaneously narrate not only what happened at Waco but also what might have happened at Waco had Tabor and Arnold's expertise been utilized. The authors' account of Waco is presented as a means to cast Waco as a cautionary tale that by its very retelling should recommend policy, procedural, and ideological changes informing future attitude and practice.

Tabor and Gallagher's (1995) account of Waco faced the challenge of presenting the scholarship of Tabor and Arnold as legitimate expertise that might have informed a law enforcement action and should inform public debate. Their success in these endeavors was considerable. Tabor's (1994, 1995) individual pieces were published in collections by Rowman and Littlefield and by the University of Chicago Press, and *Why Waco?* was published by the University of California Press and was generally well received by both academic and popular press reviewers (Bencivenga, 1995; Carroll, 1995; Harrell, 1996; Howard, 2000; Kelley, 1995; Kenney, 1995; Pitts, 1998; Ribuffo, 1996; Silk, 1995; Smith, 1995; Willis, 1995; Wright, 1997). *Why Waco?* has become a central text in scholarly and popular publications on Waco, including rhetorical scholarship on Waco and the Branch Davidians (Lindsay, 1999). When Tabor appeared before the congressional hearings on Waco in 1995, he presented the first chapter from *Why Waco?* as his prepared testimony. The media reports on that day's testimony that mentioned Tabor generally characterized him as a "religious expert" or "expert on religion" and reiterated the central positions of Tabor's argument: that theological expertise might have informed the negotiations to bring about less tragic out-

comes (Bunting & Willman, 1995; Freedman, 1995; S. Walker, 1995; Witham, 1995). In terms of professional practice, Tabor's work as a public expert has continued as he has been called on both as an expert on other millennial and apocalyptic new religious groups and, more recently, as an expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Tabor is currently the chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

The Context: *Kairos*, Expertise, and the Policy Cycle

Within this case, James Tabor's endeavors to act as a public expert must be seen in distinct rhetorical moments: those during the Waco standoff and those in the few years immediately following the event. Rhetorical theory conceptualizes rhetorical moments within *kairos*, considering contextual constraint in ratio to rhetorical agency (Bazerman, 1994; Kinneavy, 1994; Poulakos, 1993). Kinneavy (1994) and Poulakos (1993) both emphasize *kairos*'s connection to propriety and ethical concerns. They suggest that within *kairos*, we consider both what might be deemed appropriate and inappropriate within a rhetorical situation and what agency the rhetor may have in affecting the standard of appropriate and inappropriate speech. The descriptive power of *kairos* is its attempt to account for the situated opportunity of a rhetorical moment as well as the rhetor's agency to affect and/or create such a moment. This concept, as much perhaps as any in rhetorical theory, highlights the tension between constraints of situation and rhetorical agency. The tension is illustrated by describing the rhetor as *facing* or as *creating* a rhetorical opportunity and by realizing that neither phrasing is adequate alone.

To consider the rhetorical moments Tabor faced and created, I follow Bazerman's (1994) notion that calling on social scientific theory can invigorate the study of a rhetor's position and that acknowledging the social construction and constraint of modern rhetorical moments does not spell the end for the rhetorical agency posited within the classical notion of *kairos*. Because the locally situated and relatively stable institutional position of a speaker—once assumed within the classical notion of *kairos*—may not be present in contemporary public discourse, the reinvigoration of *kairos* in contemporary discourse may require greater focus on the social structures in which discourse participates. By theorizing rhetorical practices as socially situated, rhetorical agency is attached to but not overwhelmed by the social space in which it participates. Bazerman writes,

Reinterpreting *kairos* through modern social scientific theory still leaves *kairos* as a rhetorical concept, a means of locating oneself in a world of evol-

ing action with others, linked together by the fragile threads of symbols handed back and forth among us. (p. 189)

Considering rhetorical situations, including social structures and systems, can better account for contemporary rhetorical moments.

As a means to describe different moments and interactions around the making and enacting of public policy, scholars often employ the model of a policy cycle. The policy cycle operates as a necessary simplification of complex deliberative, political, social, and cultural interactions to facilitate analysis. Although models vary, common components of the policy cycle include issue identification, problem definition, decision making, implementation, evaluation, and enforcement. Policy studies scholars often argue that expertise tends to have its most significant effect in moments of agenda setting and problem definition (Benveniste, 1977; Fisher, 1993; Frankena, 1992; Rochefort & Cobb, 1994). For example, Rich (2004) writes, "The opportunities for experts to be substantively influential are greatest early in the policy process" (p. 138). During a problem-definition moment early in a policy cycle, decision makers are typically more inclined to engage a greater number of experts, and controversy and competition among experts is more likely.

Framed within the policy cycle, Tabor initially attempted to affect law enforcement policy and inform the negotiations at Waco during a moment late in the policy cycle, a moment of policy implementation. During the Waco crisis, the government agencies Tabor addressed were acting within existing policies for handling hostage-barricade situations and were calling on the expertise of those whom they had previously identified as experts or who fit their model of relevant expertise (U.S. Department of Justice, 1993b). During this phase, Tabor had little success affecting policy implementation or decision making within existing policy. Law enforcement's policy implementation did not recognize Tabor as a relevant expert. Law enforcement agencies turned primarily to behavioral scientists and anticultists to serve as experts on the Branch Davidians (Ammerman, 1995; Tabor & Gallagher, 1995; U.S. Department of Justice, 1993a). The agencies involved with implementation and the government officials involved in decision making were not inclined to consider or recognize new expertise.

As a result, Tabor's rhetorical practices during the standoff took on a quality of advocacy more than of expertise. Because Tabor was not recognized as an expert, his efforts to engage decision makers constituted an attempt to influence policy and practice during the implementation phase. In fact, during the standoff at Waco, Tabor's only significant participation, along with that of Phillip Arnold, came through radio broadcasts addressing the Branch

Davidians and from conversations with their lawyers, both of which were well outside of policy debate and decision making.

Later, Tabor experienced success as a public expert both in his written work and through his testimony at the congressional hearings on Waco. That success came during the period when the Waco catastrophe was the impetus for a policy discussion and decision makers were engaged in problem-definition activities. In 1995, postevent debate reached its highest pitch in part because of the event's connection to the Oklahoma City bombing, when Timothy McVeigh identified Waco as a motive (Mashberg, 2001). The congressional hearings on Waco called in July 1995 constitute a moment of issue identification and problem definition running through the mid- to late 90s. Tabor, along with other experts, had a voice during these public deliberations on Waco.

This participation in public discourse was not simply a matter of timing. The potential expert is not caught waiting for the next moment of problem definition. The policy process is not as strictly cyclical as the policy cycle model would suggest. Rhetorical moments of problem definition may run concurrent with implementation. The issue may be one not primarily of timing but of venue. It is clear that Tabor's greater successes came at moments when he engaged in issue identification and problem definition rather than when attempting to engage moments of implementation as an unrecognized expert.

That said, Tabor's actions as a participant and advocate during the crisis appear to have helped create a rhetorical moment for his expertise later in public debate around Waco. There is no evidence to suggest that Tabor would have been called to the congressional hearings after Waco had he not attempted to intervene at Waco and had the Branch Davidians not responded to his recorded broadcasts with Arnold. In this sense, Tabor's acts during the event, unsuccessful as they were in the context of affecting policy implementation and decision making, almost certainly helped to create the rhetorical moment for his involvement in the later debate around Waco. In this sense, we can see the tension play out between rhetorical constraint and rhetorical agency as we consider the *kairos* of Tabor's rhetorical interventions during and following Waco.

This tension complicates the distinction between advocate and expert often distinguished in the research on expertise. Frankena (1992) uses the following continuum to clarify roles in public debate:

consultant—expert—advocate—adversary (p. 204)

The principle guiding this continuum is one of positionality, where the disinterestedness of expertise is considered a marker of role in policy discourse. The distance between advocate and expert is presumed to reside in the motive and professional position of the individual. This expectation of disinterest persists in standards for evaluating expertise in public deliberation. Walton's (1997) discussion of arguments from expertise describes the extent to which expert argument may be considered distinct from the particularities of the individual arguer. In addition, Walton's (1989) work explicating the informal fallacy of *argumentum ad verecundiam* teases out the seemingly valid logic of these arguments' attachments to authority.

In Tabor's case, his advocacy led to his consideration as an expert, confounding a sharp distinction between the roles unless they are considered in terms of kairos and the policy making cycle. Rich's (2004) focus on the controversy of expertise applies here. He writes, "Present-day experts, particularly those at think tanks, are often aggressive advocates in the hard-fought battles of the policy process" (p. 208).⁴ In this sense, advocacy becomes the means by which expertise may come to be recognized in policy deliberation. In some cases, this results in an advocate's use of experts and expert knowledge. In Tabor's case, his own advocacy draws attention to his otherwise unrecognized expertise.

It is in this context that Tabor wrote the three texts analyzed for style, genre, and argument in this study. The following sections discuss the findings of these analyses:

- Stylistic variances in Tabor's texts reflect his complicated role as advocate-expert.
- Tabor uses narrative as a rhetorical hybrid, conducting intra- and interdisciplinary practice.
- Tabor's texts employ a special topic or topos of "understanding" to define and provide an expert commodity.

Stylistic Variances Reflect Tabor's Complicated Participant-Advocate and Expert Roles

By analyzing the representation of Tabor as a character in his own texts, we see that Tabor's ethos is varyingly constructed as a participant-advocate at Waco and as a more removed scholar-expert on Waco. The following examples from Tabor's (1994) "The Waco Tragedy: An Autobiographical Account of One Attempt to Avert Disaster" represent Tabor as a participant in Waco:

It was 7:25 p.m. on Sunday, February 28, 1993. My attention was suddenly riveted to an unfamiliar voice, edged with an appealing intensity, coming over CNN on the television in the next room. . . .

Slowly, we formulated a plan to approach David Koresh with an alternative scenario, seeking to meet with him within his own interpretive world. . . . What we presented . . . was a rather technical discussion of an alternative interpretation of the Book of Revelation, which we thought David Koresh might accept. As academics, we were not presenting this interpretation as our own personal view. Rather, our approach was hypothetical—given Koresh’s general world view, and the interpretation he was following of the seven seals, what about an alternative understanding? (pp. 13, 18)

These excerpts highlight Tabor’s rhetorical construction as participant rather than as a removed scholar-expert, even where the narrative describes the author’s scholar-expert activities. The first-person, participant narrative (“my attention was riveted,” “we formulated,” “we thought”) and the framing of the account as autobiography contradict genre expectations for either theological scholarship or expert discourses based in academic credibility. This is the account of Tabor’s failure to become involved in the implementation and decision-making process and of the challenges Tabor and Arnold faced in their efforts to advocate for their own expertise. It is a participant-advocate’s narrative, serving as a cautionary tale after a failed campaign.

Tabor’s representation of the story in another publication, *Why Waco?* (Tabor & Gallagher, 1995), which was the centerpiece of his public recognition as an expert, employs a different rhetorical construction. Writing with Eugene Gallagher, Tabor’s representation of similar material uses the stylistic markers more indicative of both academic and expert discourses than his earlier account:

Phillip Arnold and James Tabor offered their services to the FBI on March 7. As biblical scholars they specialized in the history of biblical apocalyptic interpretation and were generally familiar with Adventist groups although neither had ever heard of David Koresh and the Branch Davidians before February 28. They studied carefully the fifty-eight minute tape that Koresh had released on March 2 and began many hours of theological conversation over the telephone with Livingstone Fagan. (p. 13)

Tabor and Gallagher’s representation of Tabor and Arnold match generic expectations for scholarship. By referring to Tabor and Arnold in the third person and by writing from a position that belies no authorial position in the event, the authors construct both academic roles for Arnold and Tabor and the authors’ own ethos as scholar-experts. This shift in style reflects the shift in

roles from participant-advocate to scholar-expert. This shift coincides with Tabor's transition from failing to gain recognition as an expert to being recognized as an expert.

Narrative as a Hybrid Construction of Theological Expertise

Lyne and Howe (1990) have suggested that the rhetorical work of scholar-experts should be considered as intra and interdisciplinary practices because, when acting as experts, scholars bring the practices of their discipline across the academic boundary to broader audiences. In addition, Myers (2003) has argued that in the textual analysis of scientific popularization, including extradisciplinary work as experts, texts should be considered for their generic hybridity rather than be assumed to participate in a singular mode. Considering genre practices as recurrent and socially codified actions or strategies aimed to address recurrent problems and situations (Miller, 1984), the narrative introduction to *Why Waco?*, "What Might Have Happened," resonates two ways as a generic practice. First, the text employs characteristics of a causal policy argument. And second, the text employs characteristics of contemporary theological scholarship and argument.

Policy narratives have been well studied as arguments that define problems and attribute causes (cf. Fischer, 1990; Fisher, 1984; Kaplan, 1993; Rein & Schon, 1993; Stone, 1989). Rein and Schon (1993), for example, discuss the ways that "problem-setting stories" often have two functions: to link causal accounts to policy problems and to "facilitate the normative leap from 'is' to 'ought'" (p. 148). Because no narrative of a policy problem can be exhaustive, as narrative details are selected, causal arguments are necessarily made. Characters or forces are assigned the agency for outcomes. The construction of causal agency in narratives can most clearly be seen in active and in transactive sentences, where subjects act and where they act on objects. In the case of Tabor and Gallagher's (1995) *Why Waco?*, The following examples illustrate how subjects are cast as the agents of action:

The FBI apparently shared and certainly tried to perpetuate the public perception of Koresh, charging that he was a power mad, sex-crazed "con man" who constantly made up and changed the rules as things unfolded. (p. 7)

The government largely controlled the Context, or outside situation, and therefore unknowingly possessed the ability to influence Koresh in his interpretations and thus in his actions. (p. 9)

No one with any understanding of the religious dynamics of the situation had access to those making the decisions that week in Washington. (p. 21)

In narrative sentences such as these, causal arguments are made when subjects in sentences (FBI, government, no one) are connected to actions with results. In its choice of agentive subjects, a narrative assigns causal responsibility. In this case, by also frequently using impersonal, abstract subjects (government, no one), the narrative tends to affix causal agency institutionally rather than with individual characters in the narrative. These narrative features are consistent with the recognized generic practices of problem-framing policy discourse.⁵

In addition, *Why Waco?* represents the kind of intra- and interdisciplinary practice the scholar-as-expert may often employ (Lynn & Howe, 1990) as the strongly narrative features of the text resonate as a theological genre practice. In his analysis of theological discourse, Klemm (1987a, 1987b) identifies narrative form as paradigmatic of contemporary theological argument. Klemm draws a sharp distinction between the practices of academic theological argument and religious arguments, noting that the contemporary theologian does not practice “confessional” discourse and need not practice from a position of belief. “Contemporary theology is most basically hermeneutical in its methodology. By this I mean that in seeking to confront God, contemporary theologians employ methods that are historical, temporal, and interpretive” (Klemm, 1987a, p. 279). Klemm (1987a) argues that the central metaphor of theology is of God as a “sign to be interpreted,” making it the study of how individuals, societies, or cultures experience the “breaking-in” of God (p. 280). The claims of contemporary theological argument are to an understanding of how others report their experience of God.

In terms of generic practice, Klemm identifies the rhetoric of contemporary theology as participating in the narrative rationality described by Fischer (1984). Klemm’s (1987a) analysis shows how theological argument narrates human experiences. He writes,

The shift from metaphysical theology to hermeneutical theology entails a shift from traditional rationality to narrative rationality. . . . Narrative rationality locates good reasons by understanding and critically appropriating the norms that are immanent in the modes of existence portrayed and lived out in myth, history, biography, culture, and character. (p. 294)

Klemm identifies a perspective of narrative rationality in contemporary hermeneutic theology. From that understanding of theological practice, the narrative of the Waco experience in *Why Waco?* operates as a generic practice taken from Tabor and Gallagher’s (1995) disciplinary community and carried across the disciplinary boundary into their writing for public audiences. As I show in the next section, their work demonstrates theological practice by

narrating the experiences of the players in the Waco event, particularly the Branch Davidians, who were generally recognized to lack rationality of any sort. Tabor and Gallagher's claims to comprehension of the perspective of others are the foundation of their arguments for and demonstration of their expertise.

Understanding as a Special Topic and Commodity of Expertise

Identifying narrative as a disciplinary practice helps us position Tabor and Gallagher's (1995) work in relation to their professional practices, and identifying narrative as a widespread, interdisciplinary practice helps position Tabor and Gallagher's work as an interdisciplinary or extradisciplinary practice as experts in public discourse. At a finer grain, an analysis of the arguments in the text identified the prominence of the linguistic token *understanding*. For example, in the 22-page narrative introduction to *Why Waco?*, Tabor and Gallagher refer to understanding or related terms (*perspective*, *point of view*) more than 80 times, creating a special topic in their argument both by showing how it was lacking at Waco and by showing that they could provide that commodity, via their expertise, for future incidents.⁶

The authors' references to understanding and like terms were analyzed as arguments that invoke a special topic or topos. The guide for this study was the rhetorical analysis of the "topoi of complexity" in literary criticism (Fahnestock & Secor, 1991; Wilder, 2005). These researchers design their analyses by considering Aristotelian topoi or topics for argument (Aristotle, trans. 1991) as the foundation or source for warrants as described in contemporary rhetorical theory by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) and by Toulmin (1958, 1978). In this model, topoi and special topoi are presumed to exist as commonplaces on the basis of their recurrent deployment in a discourse community. Therefore, to study understanding as a special topic in this argument would mean identifying its rhetorical functions in the text and discussing its foundation as a commonplace in a discourse community.

Tabor and Gallagher (1995) bring the topic of understanding from the academic community of theology. Klemm (1987a, 1987b) provides evidence of understanding as a special topos for contemporary theology. In his analysis, Klemm (1987b) identifies the theologian as engaged in the study of an individual's experience of God. Klemm writes,

With noetic reflexivity, the dream of simply reconstructing a past (as if the "I" were a neutral onlooker) ends. The new image is that of the *event of understanding*—a "fusion of horizons" in which past and present are temporally mediated. (p. 456)⁷

Tabor and Gallagher, then, take understanding as a rhetorical commonplace from their disciplinary practice and bring it into this interdisciplinary text.

Tabor and Gallagher (1995) represent the product of their theological hermeneutics as an understanding of the Davidians' experience of God and how that perspective determined their experience and understanding of the standoff at Waco. In addition, Tabor and Gallagher represent law enforcement, competing experts, or decision-making players in the standoff as lacking that understanding. Analyses of literary criticism provide an analog for studying the hermeneutic practices of Tabor and Gallagher as theological experts. In literary studies, the complexity of literature serves as a commonplace on which warrants operate within the arguments of literary critics. The analog in Tabor and Gallagher's work is the topic of understanding. The Davidian's experience of God and their worldview is assumed to have consistency and fidelity and is presumed to be knowable through hermeneutic study. The ability to undertake that study and therefore produce knowledge of Davidian understanding is Tabor's theological expertise.

Most often, the authors invoke the topos of understanding in claims about the perceptions, views, or understandings of the parties in the Waco conflict. Often, these claims identify the character's beliefs as frames through which participants in the conflict would have been making sense of the events at Waco. For example,

As they saw it [italics added], their group had been wantonly attacked and slaughtered by government agents whom they understood to be in opposition to both God and his anointed prophet David Koresh. . . .

From the theological perspective of the Branch Davidians [italics added], his [Koresh's] message was highly systematic, rigidly consistent, and internally "logical"; *to those unfamiliar with the prophetic portions of the bible* [italics added], however, the message, delivered in his typical nonstop style with lengthy quotations from the King James version surely must have seemed nonsensical. (pp. 4, 5)

The prepositional phrases (italicized) in each of these cases contextualize the actions and events of Waco from the perspective of characters of the narrative. The authors weave into their narrative of what happened at Waco these claims to understand the perspectives of the players in the situation. In addition, these claims infuse the narrative with a sense of causality where the characters are enabled and restricted by their own understandings or perspectives.

Tabor and Gallagher (1995) also use the topos of understanding to suggest that government decision makers or experts within the conflict lacked the

ability or desire to comprehend or take as rational the Davidians' perspectives:

The *FBI apparently failed to recognize* [italics added] that according to his letter, Koresh had finally received his word from God. (p. 16)

Miron so seriously misunderstood [italics added] this vital April 14 letter that he apparently thought the mention of the names Tabor and Arnold had to do with book rights, as if they were literary agents and Koresh were interested in cutting a deal with them, despite the fact that Koresh insists that his manuscript is not to be sold. (p. 17)

The FBI letter . . . echoes this serious *failure to comprehend* [italics added] the situation. (p. 18)

The final tragedy is that when Koresh finally got his "word" on April 14, *no one with any understanding of the situation had access* [italics added] to those making the decisions that week in Washington. (p. 21)

In these phrases, Tabor and Gallagher argue that a dearth of understanding in the Waco case contributed to its tragic outcomes. The government experts and decision makers fail to marshal any theological expertise to understand the religious perspective of the Davidians at Waco. This failure becomes the cause for Waco's failed negotiations and the failure to end the standoff peacefully. Conversely, Tabor and Gallagher's own ability to understand these perspectives, demonstrated in the same account, could have provided both the means to explain Waco and also, potentially, the means by which Waco's outcomes might have been avoided. The authors demonstrate their expertise when they narrate their understanding of the Davidians' experience and of the experiences of the other players at Waco. Having narrated Waco's cause as a lack of understanding, the authors' representation of their own understanding is itself an argument for the legitimacy of their expertise in similar situations.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the practices of humanities scholars as public experts warrant examination. Accordingly, I analyzed the practices of humanities scholar James Tabor and considered his practices within a framework of previous scholarship on expertise. The successes and failures of the scholar in this case clearly had a great deal to do with the rhetorical moments that he faced and that he helped create through his own rhetorical work as an expert and as an advocate. As all scholars acting as public experts presum-

ably contend with a policy cycle, the need for the scholar-expert to acknowledge moments for advocacy and moments for expertise is certainly not limited to the scholar from the humanities. However, if the research tendency to study technical expertise from the social and hard sciences in any way reflects an inclination in public deliberation to more readily acknowledge experts from those disciplines, then the would-be expert from the humanities must not only carefully select his or her moments but also be prepared to advocate for his or her expertise as well as demonstrate it. Further research to compare the differences in expert practices between the sciences and humanities on a ratio of advocacy to expertise is warranted here.

We also see that Tabor's rhetorical practices constitute the same kind of intra- and interdisciplinary discourse that has been identified in research on the rhetoric of expertise. Tabor's efforts appear more consistent with than distinct from both strategies for intradisciplinary theological discourse and interdisciplinary generic practices of employing causal narratives to effect problem definition in public and policy debate. The author's use of the special topic of understanding demonstrates the ways a scholar from the humanities can present the knowledge produced within his or her discipline and within his or her practice as an expert commodity. Rhetorical practices in these texts appear similar in this sense to the kinds of production identified in studies of scientific and social scientific expertise. In this way, Tabor can be seen as a commodity-producing expert entering public and policy debates with audiences who are accustomed to knowledge-producing expert discourse.

Presumably, this rhetorical strategy of demonstrating a lack of understanding and demonstrating theological expertise as the means for supplying understanding depends on an intradisciplinary special topic functioning with an interdisciplinary audience. Tabor's (1994, 1995) and Tabor and Gallagher's (1995) arguments hinge on their audiences' recognizing understanding as singular and knowable via hermeneutic practice in the way a theological audience presumably would. As the authors move from intra- to interdisciplinary audiences, the success of the argument remains attached to the disciplinary values implied in understanding through hermeneutic study.

If the production of expertise calls on a special topic, then the audience's recognition of that topic's relevance and legitimacy affects that argument's persuasiveness. In other words, an audience must recognize the product of expertise as legitimate for the expert's arguments to be successful. This effort to commodify understanding can be read as an effort to shape the deliberations surrounding Waco as a technical debate, where theological training and hermeneutic practices are the credential of and the tools for expertise. Broader research might then explore whether this challenge is endemic for

and central to the practices of any humanities scholar who would act as public expert: how to produce a commodity of expertise that audiences will acknowledge as analogous to the “facts” and “knowledge” produced by experts from the hard and social sciences.

Appendix

Figure 1
Examples of the Special Topic of Understanding
in *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious*
***Freedom in America* (Tabor & Gallagher, 1995)**

In those live broadcasts Koresh offered the key to the Branch Davidians’ biblical understanding of events. (p. 3)

Listening carefully to what Koresh said in those live interviews over KRLD and CNN, a person familiar with the biblical texts could have perceived the situation in wholly different terms from the government’s hostage rescue. (p. 4)

As they saw it, their group had been wantonly attacked and slaughtered by government agents whom they understood to be in opposition to both god and his anointed prophet David Koresh. (p. 4)

Inseparable from his view of these seven seals was his understanding of himself as the unique messianic figure, sent by God to reveal the hidden meaning of the entire biblical prophetic corpus. (p. 8)

Although the Text was fixed, like a script written in advance, the Interpretation and the precise Context were variable. Koresh was waiting because he believed that God had told him to do so and because he understood a waiting period to be required by the “fifth seal.” In the meantime, he was seeking his “word from God,” which would clarify the ambiguities and uncertainties inherent in the changing outside situation. (p. 12)

Figure 2
Examples of the Special Topic of Understanding
in “The Waco Tragedy: An Autobiographical Account
of One Attempt to Avert Disaster” (Tabor, 1994)

I realized that in order to deal with David Koresh, and to have any chance for a peaceful resolution of the Waco situation, one would have to understand and make use of these biblical texts. (p. 15)

The first FBI agent Dr. Arnold contacted in Waco admitted that they were hopelessly confused when David Koresh went into one of his lengthy exposi-

tions of scripture, which occurred regularly in their daily telephone negotiations. (p. 15)

It became obvious to us that the Branch Davidian group understood itself to be actually living through the events of the seven seals, found primarily in chapter six of the Book of Revelation. (p. 17)

Given his understanding of himself as the messenger, or “anointed one,” who had been given the secret of the seven seals, he would only act as he felt God was leading him. (p. 18)

Figure 3
Examples of the Special Topic of Understanding in
“Religious Discourse and Failed Negotiations: The Dynamics
of Biblical Apocalypticism at Waco” (Tabor, 1995)

Koresh began, in those initial gripping interviews, the first of hundreds of hours of explanations, based on his understanding of the biblical apocalyptic significance of the situation in which he found himself. (pp. 263-264)

Given this understanding, the idea of “surrendering to proper authority,” as the government demanded throughout the next seven weeks, was absolutely out of the question. (p. 264)

His message was systematic, consistent, and internally logical when understood within the theological perspective of the Branch Davidians. However, to one untutored in the details of the prophetic portions of the Bible, this message, delivered in his typical nonstop style, with lengthy quotations from the King James Version, would appear nonsensical. (p. 265)

The confusion over Koresh’s understanding of himself arises from his use of the term “Christ.” Koresh knew a bit of Hebrew and Greek and had worked out an understanding of the term “Christ,” or “messiah,” which is biblically and historically correct from a linguistic point of view, but quite understandably confusing to his general Christian audience. (p. 269)

Notes

1. “David and the rest of us joyfully welcomed Tabor and Arnold’s intervention. At last someone was listening! And not just anyone, but a pair of reputable theologians who talked our talk, who understood that our message was not kooky weirdness but a valid part of a long tradition of apocalyptic belief. The smile on David’s face as he listened to the KGBS broadcast and replayed the tape was as wide as the Grand Canyon” (Thibodeau & Whiteson, 1999, p. 244).

2. Tabor was recognized as expert in neither the Justice Department report’s (U.S. Department of Justice, 1993b) list of those consulted for expertise during Waco nor in the reports by experts solicited by the Justice Department (U.S. Department of Justice, 1993a) after Waco.

Arnold is identified in the Justice Department report as being an expert recognized by the Davidians, not by the FBI.

3. Gallagher has since also published independently on Waco and the Branch Davidians (Gallagher, 2001).

4. See also Waddell (1990): "[Scientists] can use their authority as scientists to lobby for appropriate application of their work" (p. 381).

5. As a book-length presentation of an issue as a policy case, *Why Waco?* participates in a tradition of works such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* or Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed*. See Stone (1989) and Oravec (2000).

6. For clarity, I report the findings in this section from Tabor's (1995) most publicly distributed, recognized, and received work, the introduction to his collaboration with Eugene Gallagher, *Why Waco?* However, these findings are consistent across Tabor's three writings for public audiences in 1994 and 1995. See Figures 1, 2, and 3 in the appendix for examples.

7. It should be noted, however, that neither this study nor the small sample sizes in Klemm's (1987a, 1987b) work, which I have called on here, establish this special topoi in the manner the topoi of complexity has been established in the research on literary criticism.

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