President Richard Nixon made one of his most famous speeches on November 3, 1969 concerning the deep division surrounding the Vietnam war. Dr. Forbes I. Hill, Assistant Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences at Queens College of the City University of New York offered a neo-Aristotelian criticism to this speech in an article titled *Conventional Wisdom-Traditional Form-The President’s Message of November 3, 1969*.

Dr. Hill, a Ph.D. graduate of Cornell University, is a rhetoric scholar who during his career reviewed a variety of rhetorical-based literature and was a featured contributor to several professional communication journals. Hill is held in high regard by his colleagues and former students as evidenced in an oral history of Dr. Joan Leichter Dominick, Associate Professor of Communication at Kennesaw State University. Forbes Hill was Dr. Dominick’s advisor during her undergraduate transfer to Queens College and introduced her to Aristotle. According to her oral history, Dr. Hill was one of the best teachers she ever had, leading her to change her major to rhetorical theory. She fondly remembers him as going out of his way to mentor her, changing her life forever.

Approaching Nixon’s speech from a traditional perspective, Hill questions the correctness of other ideological criticisms of Nixon’s wartime rhetoric. He attempts to discover whether the speaker made the best choices from the persuasive factors to get a favorable decision from a specified audience in a specific situation. As rhetoric is limited to the ability to see what is possibly persuasive in every given case, Hill does not attempt to discover if the speaker actually gets his desired decision. As a neo-Aristotelian critic, Hill outlines the situation, specifies the audience, and defines the kind of decision they are to make. Then he evaluates the
three rhetorical proofs, ethos, logos, and pathos, against the standard of the *Rhetoric* by Aristotle.

In the article’s closing, Hill offered a general assessment as to how well Nixon did in choosing among the available means of persuasion for the situation. Organizing his criticism in this logical, systematical manner made the article easy to follow and digest even for a beginner in rhetorical criticism.

Hill follows a strict neo-Aristotelian approach. He termed Nixon’s speech as deliberative and clearly illustrated the Aristotelian pattern of narrative with both constructive and refutative proofs, and an epilogue. Hill is able to convey to an amateur how artistically the speech was developed, demonstrating speaker ethos, audience pathos, and technical expertise in the logos.

The author believes that this approach is the best method for understanding the effectiveness of Nixon’s rhetoric about the Vietnam war. Hill robustly defends traditional criticism and believes that the goal is to ascertain whether the writer made strategically sound decisions in light of the audience and historical context.

Hill acknowledges that neo-Aristotelianism does have some limitations. He states “I submit that the limitations of neo-Aristotelian criticism are the metrical conventions of the poet-limitations that make true significance possible.” Such limitations prevent the examination of some basic and long-run questions in other forms of critique. For example, wisdom of the choice of the target audience for this speech is not assessed. The primary target was the silent majority of Americans not clearly driven to oppose or support the war at any cause. Nixon excluded the radical opponents to the war from his speech. The limitation does not warrant the questioning of whether or not the speech should have also been aimed at the fanatical opponents. Nor does neo-Aristotelian criticism warrant estimation of the truth of Nixon’s statements or the reality of the values he portrays as aspects of American life. The author deems that the neutral traditional
approach is best and that if anyone wishes to assess the truth of Nixon’s statements they must also be willing to bear the burden of proof. It is my opinion that Hill remained neutral to the subject, followed strict neo-Aristotelian guidelines and imparted no personal biases.

As the reader and reviewer, I found this rhetorical criticism to be insightful and interesting. It dissected Nixon’s speech in a manner that really makes one think about politics, public relations, and the notorious propaganda machine. I am now looking forward to examining other forms of rhetorical criticism because as Hill himself acknowledges, this form of criticism does have some limitations.