In “I.A. Richards and a Meaning-Centered Theory of Rhetoric” Richards defines rhetoric as based upon understanding rhetoric in terms of communication. It Richards’ *Philosophy of Rhetoric,* rhetoric “should be a study of misunderstandings, and its remedies” (p. 261). This specific approach to not only defining rhetoric, but understanding it as a means to remove misunderstandings from our communication leads to the “context theorem of understanding” (p. 261). Here is a different view of rhetoric. No longer is persuasion discussed as the primary goal of rhetoric. Rather, there is a call to shift to studying how misunderstandings occur. To do this Richards addresses the metaphoric aspect of language. Richards views language as abstract, and the metaphor as “the use of one reference to a group of things between which a given relation holds” (p. 266). The metaphor is a driving force behind language, and as a result our communication. Communication is also discussed as a response to stimuli and/or data.

I see this as similar to the Rogers’ “Dealing with Breakdowns” because of the attention to understanding the breakdown in communication based on reactions. Rogers states that there is a “natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve or disapprove” (p. 330), which leads to the person not speaking awaiting the change to interrupt or interject, as opposed to listening. To better listen we need to listen with understanding, which leads to “real communication” (p. 331). To listen in this way Rogers suggests that people can only talk for themselves after they repeat what the speaker said. This is done in hopes of achieving an “empathic understanding—understanding with a person, not about him,” but the dangers of this are that it can change your own position or personality, which may be unsettling. The goal is to listen with the speaker. Where I am confused, or have questions, is how this is different than rhetorically listening. Is it the same general idea, or is this specific approach to listening somehow different?

This reminded me of Berlin’s approach to studying rhetorics. He felt that we had to study rhetorics, plural, due to the fact that there always exist a dominant system of rhetorics, and other competing systems of rhetorical ideas and theories. Here is one example of a competing system, but also I don’t think it’s necessary to choose one theory or system. Certainly as a scholar you can’t jump from one to the other, but you can use them in a combination to bring about a deeper or greater understanding and use of rhetoric.

What I find interesting about this week’s readings is the shift away from rhetoric as persuasion, and a bigger focus on communication, or more specifically effective communication, which is presented as maintaining understanding. Maintaining understanding for Richards is based on understanding the metaphors within language, and for Rogers it is listening. The purpose of studying misunderstandings, I think, is to achieve the ultimate goal of how to prevent them. Does preventing them lead to discourse that solves problems, or complex issues, or is this merely about communicating a point, whatever it may be effectively?