ISSA Proceedings 2014 – A Defense Of Taking Some Novels As Arguments

Abstract: This paper's main thesis is that in virtue of being believable, a believable novel makes an indirect transcendental argument telling us something about the real world of human psychology, action, and society. Three related objections are addressed: a Stroud-type philosophical objection – as well as an empirical objection—questioning the force of this kind of transcendental argument, and the objection that a version of 'the paradox of fiction' applies to this account.

1. *Introduction*

This paper's main thesis is that in virtue of *being* believable, a believable novel makes an indirect argument telling us something about the real world of human psychology, action, and society. This involves that believable novels are arguments, not in the sense that they are stories that explicitly offer arguments (perhaps didactically or polemically), but in the sense that, as wholes, they indirectly exhibit the distinctive structure of a kind of transcendental argument. As applied here, Stroud's influential objection (1968) to transcendental arguments would be that from believability, the only conclusion that could be licensed concerns how we must *think* or *conceive* of the real world. Moreover, Currie holds that such notions are probably false: the empirical evidence "is all against this idea … that readers' emotional responses track the real causal relations between things" (2011b). Finally, a version of the 'the paradox of fiction' pertains. Certainly, responding with a full range of emotions to a novel requires that it be believable. Yet since we know the novel is fiction, we do not believe it. So in what does its believability consist? This paper will address these three related objections.**[i]**

I start with the idea that believability is 'the master criterion of the novel' (as one reviewer of an ancestor of this paper put it), or at least is a central criterion of

assessment. It is always reasonable to ask about a novel – is it successful 'make-believe'? No doubt the distinctive power and sweep of the novel is its unrivaled potentiality for intricate plot and associated character development. But for any believable plot/character development complex, we can ask – what principles or generalizations would have to be true about the real world (of human psychology, action, and society) in order for the fictional complex to be believable? Because this also always seems a reasonable question to ask, and because it can be an unanalyzed datum or given that a novel is indeed believable, the following transcendental argument scheme is generated:

(1) This story (complex) is believable.
(2) This story is believable only if such and such principles operate in the real world.
(3) Therefore, such and such principles operate in the real world.

The believability premise
(1) is a proposition about the novel; it is not a self-referential claim made by the novel (although in degenerate cases such as parts of Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* the novel seems to be explicitly claiming about itself that it is believable). If (1) were an implicit or explicit claim made by the novel, the question of whether this claim itself is believable would arise, and so on into an unpleasant regress. The idea is that in virtue of *being* believable (not claiming to be believable), a novel makes an argument telling us something about the real world.
(2) expresses the specific inference license or rule that allows a novel to be an argument, according to the present theory; it is not something that any novelist need intend or even be aware of. The idea is that the believability of a novel requires that certain principles or generalizations be true about the actual world.
(3) is the conclusion. It indicates which principles operate in the real world, which is primarily of human nature given the subject matter of novels. For illustration, consider Nussbaum (1990, pp. 139-140) on Henry James' *The Golden Bowl*:

The claim that our loves and commitments are so related that infidelity and failure of response are more or less inevitable features even of the best examples of loving is a claim for which a philosophical text would have a hard time mounting direct argument. It is only when, as here, we study the loves and attentions of a finely responsive mind such as Maggie's, through all the contingent complexities of a tangled human life, that . . . we have something like a persuasive argument that these features hold of human life in general.

As applied here, (3) is the generalized (and rosy) "claim that our loves and commitments are so related that infidelity and failure of response are more or less inevitable features even of the best examples of loving," which is *implicated* by the believability of the plot/character development complex: "the loves and attentions of a finely responsive mind such as Maggie's, through all the contingent complexities of a tangled human life."

The Nussbaum quotation also illustrates what is not all that uncommon: a vague, undeveloped recognition of the (transcendental) structure of the argument of a novel. Here is another example: Rodden (2008, p. 155) says "in more didactic novels such as George Orwell's 1984, we are often aware of a presence arranging and evaluating ideas and *characters* in building a convincing argument." I am trying to shed some light on how characters can be 'arranged' into an argument, not, trivially, how (e.g.) the speeches of characters sometimes overtly state arguments.

These considerations mean that (1)-(3) constitute a schematic *meta*-level representation of the argument of a believable novel, which, at the object level, is only indirectly expressed by the novel.

2. *Believability and the paradox of fiction*
In what does believability consist? A novel's believability seems to be determined mostly by what can be called the 'internal' and 'external' coherence of the event complex. I take Schultz (1979, p. 233) to be succinctly explicating internal coherence where he says: "the events must be *motivated* in terms of one another . . . either one event is a causal (or otherwise probable) consequence of another; or some events [sic] happening provides a character with a reason or motive for making another event happen" (cf., e.g., Cebik, 1971, p. 16). A novel is not believable if in it things keep happening for no apparent reason or in a way that is inadequately connected with the other events in the novel. Certainly, this applies to some degree to James Joyce's *Ulysses* and William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, for example.

But even if the events of a novel are fully connected, the novel may still not be believable because those connections do not cohere well with our widely shared basic assumptions about how human psychology and society not only actually, but necessarily work. This is the main component of external coherence. The believability of a novel requires that its plot and characters be developed in ways

that generally conform to our fundamental shared assumptions about human nature. It might be wondered whether there is circularity here. I am saying both that the believability of a novel requires this kind of external coherence and, with the rule of inference (2) above, that the believability of a novel implicates certain truths of human nature. However, it seems there is no pernicious circularity, mainly because both of these statements are meta-level generalities. Even though at the object level a given novel's specific argument is only indirectly made by the novel itself, the reader or reviewer can summarize how the argument proceeds. And in this summary, there is no appearance of circularity. The summary starts with the unadorned premise that the novel – let Henry James' *The Golden Bowl* again be the example – is believable. It seems that generally, believability is experienced by the reader as a simple, unanalyzed datum or measure of the novel, continuously updated as the reader progresses through the novel and imaginatively engages with it. And, like Aristotle said about judging the happiness of a person, you do not know for sure about believability until you reach the novel's end. Of course, a few paragraphs back, there is already a conveniently short abbreviation of the remainder of this novel's argument. Put another way, the experience of a novel's believability is one thing, determining which specific truths of human nature are implicated may be quite another and may lie in the province of literary criticism.

A novel does not have to be realistic in order to be believable. The events of a novel can be far-fetched or remote, as in a science fiction, fantasy, or allegorical novel. Extremism of this sort seems to have little effect on believability so long as the events related are reasonably well-connected, and our fundamental shared assumptions about human nature, and about physical nature of course, are generally respected. Even with substantial alterations in fiction of physical or psychic reality, if the author's development of these alterations is internally consistent and coherent and exhibits firm suspension of the author's disbelief, and if the author successfully depicts the characters as believing what is going on as if it is normal, this can make the novel believable for the reader. (The author in effect says, 'suppose for the sake of argument …') There may be a kind of transference or transitivity of the suspension of disbelief here. For such a novel, trusting the characters and watching them for signs seems analogous to watching flight attendants for signs the flight is going well or badly – a kind of 'reality check', as it were. On the other hand, a novelist may push the envelope regarding physical nature (a possible example is H. P. Lovecraft's novella *The Call of*

Cthulhu) or psychic reality (a possible example is Max Beerbohm's *Zukeila Dobson*), to the point where neither we, nor the characters, nor the author really understand what is going on. Here, believability breaks down, and consequently, no argument can get off the ground.

In using Coleridge's (1817, p. 314) phrase "suspension of disbelief" here, I do not mean to suggest that the believability of a novel involves believing that its event complex is true; rather, it involves believing that the event complex *could* have been true in a strong sense of 'could' – stronger, for example, than that of mere logical possibility. As Aristotle famously said, "the poet's job is not to tell what has happened but the kind of things that *can* happen, i.e., the kind of events that are possible according to probability or necessity" (*Poetics*, Ch. 9). So while nonfictional narration (history, biography, etc.) aims at veracity, the novel aims at verisimilitude or depicting events and characters "according to probability or necessity," which I would explain as determined principally by internal and external coherence.**[ii]**

This approach suggests a solution to the much-discussed 'paradox of fiction/of fictional emotions'. It certainly seems that the believability of a novel and our emotional response to the novel are interrelated: a novel's being believable allows responding to it with a full range of emotions, or conversely, responding with a full range of emotions to a novel requires that it be believable. Yet since we know it is fiction, we do not believe it. So how can it be both steadfastly unbelieved and believable – known to be false and (e.g.) a tear-jerker? More formally, the paradox of fiction is that although all three of the following propositions seem plausible, they cannot all be true:

a: We have genuine emotional responses to certain fictional narratives.
b: We believe that those narratives are fictional.
c: (a) and (b) are incompatible (each implies the denial of the other).

Thus, solutions typically deny one or the other of these three propositions. What are generally regarded as implausible or distorted solutions, either deny (a), as in the case of Walton's postulation of "quasi-emotions" (e.g., 1978), or they deny (b) (e.g., Suits, 2006).

The solution suggested by the above, like most solutions, denies (c), but I think it uniquely gives believability a prominent role. It is a possible-world solution. We

believe that the plot/character development complex (event complex) of a novel is not real because we know that generally it is a merely possible (nonactual) world constructed by the novelist. However, for a believable novel, the possible world constructed by the novelist is strongly 'accessible' from the actual world, where the core idea of one world being accessible to another is that the one is possible *given the facts of* the other – in this case, notably, the basic facts of human nature. The basic facts of human nature are held common across the worlds. Thus, accessibility grounds believability, which in turn grounds emotional response. Although believability requires that perceived fundamental facts of human (and physical) nature be respected, a novel is a complex counterfactual. But it is commonplace that we have emotional responses, unquestionably genuine, to all manner of situations that are *not presently actual* – and so are counterfactual in at least this sense. Indeed, it is hard to see how there could be practical reasoning without such responses.

I don't know about you, but I *fear* a stock market crash. This fear fully motivates me to take measures to minimize the financial damage to me should a crash occur. It may be that the particular kind of crash that I fear has not and will never in fact occur (though it could be significantly probable), and so, unbeknownst to me, the possibility is metaphysical and not merely epistemic ('for all I know, we're in for a crash'). Of course, the counterfactuals of a novel are generally metaphysical – the events and characters depicted have not and will never occur or exist (in the actual world). But this is by no means always the case. For example, consider some of the events of *From the Earth to the Moon* by Jules Verne, or consider any historical fiction. My key point is that it seems to make little if any difference to our emotional response whether the possibilities (counterfactuals) we consider are perceived to be metaphysical or epistemic, fictional or temporary, so long as they are *believable*. The critical link and parity among them is that they are all creatures of the imagination, wherein their believability is determined. However, the perceived status of the possibility may of course make a big difference in our behavioral response. Adapting a favorite example, we may be horrified by the events depicted in a horror film because they are believable; yet because we don't believe them, we don't flee the theater. In other words, we don't flee the theater because we know the possible world of the horror film is metaphysical, in relevant ways. Failing to adequately take into account such differences in behavioral response perhaps (confusedly) leads to thinking that emotional responses to fiction are themselves qualitatively

distinctive or are only "quasi-emotions."

We use our emotional – or more generally, affective – responses to different possible courses of future actions or events (and their potential consequences) to help test them out and select among them where we have a choice, or to be *prepared* where what will happen is out of our control. The thought of such a possibility may bring fear, anger, disgust, anxiety, interest, arousal, joy, or whatever, but the bottom line seems to be that "emotions" have a "cognitive dimension" in that they "embody some of our most deeply rooted views about what has importance, views that could easily be lost from sight during sophisticated intellectual reasoning" (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 42; cf. Johnston, 2001). Such affective responses to fictional possibilities figure in the contribution that reading novels makes to enhancing practical reasoning skill, which is by "offering us the opportunity to practice thinking about difficult and interesting situations and complex personalities and providing us with examples of how to discriminate salient features of such situations and characters" (Depaul, 1988, p. 563; cf. also Clark, 1980, and Gendler & Kovakovich, 2006 for some similarities to the approach I take here).

3. *The stroud-type philosophical objection*
Transcendental arguments on the order, for example, of Davidson's directed against skepticism about other minds (1991, pp. 159-160), reason that since certain aspects of our experience or inner world are undeniable, the external world must have certain features, on the grounds that its having these features is a necessary condition of our experience being the way it is. In my representation, the argument of a believable novel is of this type. Stroud (1968) famously objected to such transcendental arguments that they are too 'ambitious' (the terminology is Stern's, 2007) – that the only condition and conclusion that could be licensed is that we must *think* or *conceive* of the external world as having certain features, not that it actually does. The objection as applied to the novels case is that it would be enough to allow our experience of believability if having this experience implicated only that we *perceive* the real world as operating in accordance with certain principles.

The first thing to note in response is that this 'modest' version of the transcendental argument of a believable novel is still an argument; there is still an argument whether we take "real world" in (2) and (3) of the schematic representation above to refer to the real world *simpliciter* or to how we must

conceive of the real world.

Second, no doubt in certain cases I may find a novel believable, whereas you do not. But I think that there is no fundamental relativity of believability because there is such a thing as human nature, which we all share and to which we have significant introspective or 'privileged' access, or at least psychological attunement.**[iii]** The believable novel taps into and relies on these facts, bringing operant principles to the fore. If this general idea were not true, then it would be pretty inexplicable that there is widespread agreement about which novels are good novels. Being believable is a central necessary condition for a novel to be a good novel. So in the case of the ambitious version of the argument of a novel that began this paper, the leap from the inner to outer worlds is limited and facilitated. The leap is from our psychological experience of believability of the novel to the real world of human psychology, action, and society – which is the primary subject matter of all novels. This subject matter is basically human nature, I take it. The inner and outer worlds of the ambitions argument are significantly the same; it is not as if the worlds are distinct as, for example, thought and a brain in a vat, as in Putnam's memorable transcendental argument (1981, Ch. 1). And, as Nagel (1979, Ch. 12) forcefully argued, because after all we are human, we know what *it is like to be human* in a way we do not know *what it is like* to have a different nature, such as a bat's (and perceive the world primarily through echolocation, be capable of flying, etc.).

Such philosophical considerations indicate that the principles identified in the argument of the novel resonate in believability largely because they are *true* of human nature; they indicate that some ambitious version of the argument of the novel is justified.

4. *The currie-type empirical objection*
In recent years, Currie has made something of a cottage industry for himself questioning such claims on empirical grounds – questioning, as he likes to put it, 'whether we learn about the mind from literature'. It is no doubt common to think that we do so-learn; for example, consider Lehrer's 2007 book *Proust Was a Neuroscientist*. Currie's writing on this topic includes pieces in the popular press (2011a; 2011b; 2013). Perhaps his most strident, though scholarly, articulation of his view is this (2012, p. 30):

And could [Samuel] Johnson have been rationally confident that Shakespeare has

shown how human nature acts in real exigencies, when he, Johnson, carried out no surveys, no carefully structured experiments, to find out whether it really was so? Johnson was delightfully confident in his opinions of many things, and rated himself a great observer of his fellow creatures, but the last 50 years of psychological investigation has shown how often we are wrong about our own motives and actions, and those of others, and how little penetrating intellect and common sense can help us overcome our ignorance. When Leavis says, rather grudgingly, that Hard Times does not give "a misleading representation of human nature" (Leavis 1948, p. 233) it is tempting – to ask how he could possibly know something that not even the greatest psychologist would think of claiming: what human nature is.

Of course my answer to Currie's last point is that the *believability* of *Hard Times* has something to do with it. Currie's view constitutes a challenge to my claim that some ambitious version of the transcendental argument of a believable novel is justified, which would require that our conceptions of human nature are generally true. Again, I claim that the believable novel taps into and relies on these conceptions, bringing operant principles to the fore.

Let us for the moment try to step back from the possible detail of "surveys" and "carefully structured experiments" and look at the big picture. By virtually any biological measure such as population numbers and adaptability to different environments, *Homo sapiens* are an extremely and uniquely successful social species. (Indeed, we are so successful that in some ways we are victims of our own success: overpopulation, pollution, etc.) Is it not obvious that this success would not be possible if we were largely "wrong about our own motives and actions, and those of others" or in general about our conceptions of human nature, and if "penetrating intellect and common sense" were of little use in augmenting self- and social knowledge? We know ourselves and others and the operant psychological / sociological principles or generalizations well enough that our actions and interactions are mostly predictable, often drearily so. Our fundamental, shared conceptions of human nature allow us to function and flourish, and this is evidence of their (at least approximate) truth, in much the same way that the spectacular success of the physical sciences in their predictive power and technological applications ('they work') is evidence of their (at least approximate) truth.

This seems to be so even if something like epiphenomenalism is true, whereby our

conscious and self-conscious life is not causally efficacious in the physical world. As far as any competition for world domination by a "social" creature goes, ants are perhaps our only real rival. But we are sharply unlike ants. We have a mental life, and it is a rich mental life. It is hard to see how we could function and flourish if our mental life were so out of sync with reality as in Currie's bleak picture, even if mental processes only attend physical processes – where the real action is. It seems that such a mental life would consist largely of bewilderment and confusion.

But epiphenomenalism is a radical view. Suppose rather that conceptualization and thinking come to the fore and are causally efficacious primarily in such things as problem-solving, including in response to when we act or interact in unexpected fashion, and that otherwise we mostly unthinkingly function with reliable 'animal' expectations of our behaviors (behaviors that are predictable by us but not predicted). This seems to be more like what is actually the case. Yet of course it is then all the more implausible that we could function and flourish and our mental life be so out of sync with reality as in Currie's view.

None of this is like a suspicious evolutionary argument about the origins of some specific creature feature. One may easily get tangled up in alternative possible explanations of particular adaptations. For example, at one point paleontologists thought that the regression relationship between the dorsal fin area and the body volume of the pelycosaur showed that this 'sail' fin was a temperature-regulating mechanism. Later, this explanation was more or less replaced by the behavioral explanation that the fin was used for sexual display (Gould, 2007, p. 253). Of course it could have had both functions, or neither. Our conceptions of human nature, as a whole, lie at an altogether different level. There is no alternative possible explanation of their existence and entrenchment other than that they have evolved in answer to millions of years of human needs.

So what are the kinds of psychological "surveys" and "carefully structured experiments" Currie uses to make his case that our conceptions of human nature are largely wrong, that "our insight into the mind generally is very limited"? One is the "imagined professor" experiment, which indicates that to do better at a game of Trivial Pursuit, for example, imagining a professor helps, whereas imagining a soccer hooligan hurts. This is supposedly surprising, and illustrates that "our minds are prone to capture by unconscious imitation." More significantly, this principle is said to be borne out in the strong empirical evidence

of a causal relationship between "media violence and imitative aggression," about which there is supposedly a huge "disconnect between research results and public opinion" (2010, p. 201).

Another allegation is that folk psychology, like the novel, believes in character and character explanations, and that makes us prone to error, as when we "infer good character from attractive appearance." Experiments suggest that small changes in circumstances can make a big difference in our behavior, as where "people who have just found a dime in a phone booth" are a lot more likely to assist someone outside in need of help than those who had no such luck. (I know the example is dated!) Of seminarians on their way to "give a short talk on the parable of the Good Samaritan," one group was told there was "no hurry," and the rest that they were "slightly late." On the way, "a confederate faked a collapse." Compared to those in the no-hurry group, the others were a great deal more likely to ignore and even step over the collapsed person (2010, pp. 202-203).

Another allegation is that our minds are prone to illegitimately link the literal and the metaphorical, as in the case of "our ready use of a warmth-coldness scale for persons … from developmentally important experiences of physical closeness to caregivers." If you briefly hold a hot cup of coffee, you are then more likely to behave generously and classify a person with whom you are interacting as "warm" (2010, p. 204).

It seems that each of these specific allegations is to some degree disputable, but I will not do that here. Similarly, I will not respond to Currie's *ad hominem* against novelists and other creative people; for example, he cites "a mid-1990s study of creative groups which found that only one of fifty writers (Maupassant) was free of psychopathology" (2011b). It should be enough to point out that compared to the reasons for believing that our conceptions of human nature, on the whole, allow us to function and flourish, the kind of evidence of detail that Currie presents seems to be a case of not being able to see the forest for the trees. Indeed, it is hard to see how any amount of such evidence of detail would be equal to the task Currie assigns it.

To be sure, at a higher level, Currie says "we have little grounds on which to trust our folk-psychological theories – any more than we these days trust folk physics, which has been shown to be substantially at odds with scientifically informed theories of the interaction of bodies" (2010, pp. 201-202). Yet does this just

confuse the general *vagueness* of folk psychology and folk physics with *falsity*, or is it trying to say what anyone should admit, that as you go from folk to scientific theories, the truths identified tend to become less approximate (where this trend is less clear or more plagued with historical exceptions in the "social" sciences)? Should we stay off the pyramids because the ancient Egyptians used folk physics? At perhaps a less exacting level than the pyramid builders, we are always or almost always interacting with bodies in ways that could reasonably be said to require our use of folk physics, e.g., cooking dinner, driving a car, or playing baseball. Current theoretical physics should undermine our trust here not one wit, or if it did, one wants to say 'that way insanity doth lie'.

5. *Conclusion*

Finally, Currie says that "we have been strangely complacent in assuming that we do learn [from fiction], without any better evidence than our own feelings of having learned something" (2011a, p. 49). This paper has tried to show that, on the contrary, such feelings may be firmly grounded in the believability of the fiction, and all that is entailed by that, so the complacency is not strange. It is warranted.

NOTES

i. While this paper addresses these three possible objections, in two previous papers I consider other issues that arise in understanding some novels to be arguments (2011; 2012).

ii. The distinction between nonfictional and fictional narration with respect to believability may not be as sharp as suggested here. Olmos (2014; forthcoming) proposes a general account of credibility that covers both types of narration.

iii. A recent influential article on introspection (Schwitzgebel, 2008) poses little threat to my points here concerning human nature and its operant principles, because the focus of the article is on the untrustworthiness of introspection of immediate conscious experience. Differences among readers in the perceived believability of a novel may be largely attributable to relatively extraneous factors, such as the setting of the novel. For example, if I could get past the

fantastic details of Tolkein's trilogy, I think I could better appreciate these novels as implicating truths of human nature.

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ISSA Proceedings 2014 – Suppositions In Argumentative Discussions: A Pragma-Dialectical Solution For Two Puzzles Concerning Thought Experimentation

Abstract: The practice of constructing imaginary scenarios for the sake of argument is sometimes referred to as 'thought experimentation.' In this paper, I employ analytical tools from the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation in order to clarify two theoretical puzzles that have been formulated with respect to thought experimentation. I do so by analysing the place and function of argumentative moves that contain suppositions in their propositional content. Three such moves are distinguished: proposing suppositions, accepting suppositions and using suppositions.

1. *Introduction*

Thought experimentation is a pattern of argumentative discourse in which the speaker constructs an imaginary scenario with the aim of showing that a previously expressed opinion is unacceptable. The pattern is usually encountered in scholarly communication and unfolds along the following lines. The author begins by calling into question a theory (principle, claim etc.) that some fellow scholar accepts. Next, the author proposes that some imaginary scenario is supposed for the sake of argument. This imaginary scenario will typically contain borderline impossible events and objects. Some well-known thought experiments speak of superhuman abilities, incredibly precise mechanisms, fantastic worlds, highly improbable coincidences etc. The borderline impossibility of the described events, however, does not seem to affect the author's argumentation. Because of what would happen in the imagined scenario, we are told, the academic theory

under discussion is deemed unacceptable.

The following thought experiment has been put forward by Jackson (1986) and it is known as "Mary's Room" (sometimes also "The Knowledge Argument"). The targeted position in this case is *physicalism*, a philosophical conception according to which everything is (ultimately) physical. For a physicalist, all knowledge of the world is, generally speaking, knowledge of physical particles in motion. In response to this, Jackson invites us to consider the following scenario:

Mary is a brilliant scientist who is, for whatever reason, forced to investigate the world from a black and white room via a black and white television monitor. She specializes in the neurophysiology of vision and acquires, let us suppose, all the physical information there is to obtain about what goes on when we see ripe tomatoes, or the sky, and use terms like 'red', 'blue', and so on. She discovers, for example, just which wavelength combinations from the sky stimulate the retina, and exactly how this produces via the central nervous system the contraction of the vocal chords and expulsion of air from the lungs that results in the uttering of the sentence 'The sky is blue'. What will happen when Mary is released from her black and white room or is given a colour television monitor? Will she learn anything or not? It seems just obvious that she will learn something about the world and our visual experience of it. But then is it inescapable that her previous knowledge was incomplete. But she had all the physical information. Ergo there is more to have than that, and Physicalism is false. (p. 130)

Until the early 1990s, thought experiments were discussed only in passing, and more as a curious case than as proper forms of academic discourse (see for example Fodor, 1964; Kuhn, 1977; Mach, 1976; Popper, 1992; Sheldon, 1973). Subsequently, several monographs, collections of essays and papers brought the topic back to life, prompting quite intense debates over how thought experimentation works and how it should work (Brown, 1991; Dennett, 2013; Frappier, Meynell, & Brown, 2013; Gendler, 2000; Häggqvist, 1996; Horowitz & Massey, 1991; Wilkes, 1988). The practice turned out to be the source of some enduring puzzles about science and argumentation. I want to focus on two such puzzles. I think these particular two are variations on what is essentially the same theme and I will later claim that both can be resolved (or dissolved) by employing tools developed in the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984; 2004; van Eemeren, 2010).

2. *Two puzzles concerning thought*

The first puzzle has arisen when trying to answer a seemingly simple question: Are thought experiments arguments? To some scholars, the answer is clearly yes; to others, it is clearly no. The practice of thought experimentation seems to have an argumentative dimension, but seems, at the same time, to be intriguingly different from the typical, deductive or inductive schemes in which argumentation is usually cast. According to Norton (1991; 1996; 2004), thought experiments "are merely picturesque arguments" (2004, p. 1139) and "to conduct a thought experiment is to execute an argument" (1996, p. 356). According to the other camp, equating thought experiments with arguments – or reconstructing them as such – misses a more general (perhaps 'the') point about this practice. For example, Brown (1986; 1991) argues that at least in some cases, reconstructing thought experiments as arguments would obscure the way in which we "grasp" the scientific laws and concepts. In a similar vein, Gendler (2000; 2004) argues that reconstructing thought experiments as arguments is misleading because thought experiments do not reach their conclusion inferentially but "quasi-observationally" (2004, p. 1154). The variety of positions that have been taken with respect to this puzzle is not captured, of course, by this brisk overview (De Mey, 2003; Häggqvist, 1996; Moue, Masavetas, & Karayianni, 2006). However, the crux of the matter should be evident: thought experiments seem to have an obvious argumentative dimension, they work fully or partially in much the same way arguments do, but pinpointing this dimension brings one into conceptual problems. Are they 'just' arguments? Are they 'more than that'?

The second puzzle has its origin in the papers of Fisher (1989) and Bowels (1993) on the so-called "suppositional argument." The suppositional argument presents the logician with a problem because its premises are made up of suppositions, and suppositions are quite clearly not in the same class with assertions (Fisher, 1989, p. 402). Supposing for the sake of argument that there is a brilliant scientist locked up in a room is indeed an altogether different speech act than asserting the same content. If the notion of argumentation is defined as a sequence of *assertives* put forward in support of a conclusion, the 'suppositional argument' appears to be a contradiction in terms. Fisher's proposed solution is to redefine our conception of argument altogether so as to include this deviant case. Theories that model argumentation merely as a sequence of assertives should then recognize the suppositional argument as "a serious omission" (1989, p. 401).**[i]** While Fisher and Bowels do not use the term 'thought experiment,' it is evident

from the examples they discuss (Galileo's Falling Bodies thought experiment *inter alia*) that the raised issues pertain to the practice of thought experimentation. The question becomes: is thought experimentation an altogether different class of argumentative behaviour? If so, what kind of theory would cover both thought experiments and the more 'normal' arguments made up of assertives?

While these two puzzles and their corresponding debates belong to different disciplinary contexts, it should be clear that they are not worlds apart. The general claim of this paper is that the puzzlement in each case has its origin in a persistent ambiguity concerning the relationship between the imaginary scenario and the targeted academic claim. Resolving this ambiguity should resolve the puzzlement.

3. *Argumentative moves with suppositions*
The analytical distinctions that will be introduced in what follows are based on the pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984; van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004; van Eemeren, 2010). In this model, a speech act counts as an argumentative move if it contributes to the process of resolving of a difference of opinion. Two speakers are said to have a difference of opinion when they externalize different standpoints with respect to the same propositional content. For example, one speaker might put forward a positive standpoint (e.g. 'I think jazz is more difficult to lear than blues'), while the other speaker puts forward either doubt (e.g. 'I'm not so sure about that') or the opposite standpoint (e.g. I think it's the other way around: Blues is way more difficult!'). In pragma-dialectics, a critical discussion is divided into four stages: the confrontation stage in which the difference of opinion is externalized, the opening stage in which the parties try to find a common ground, the argumentation stage in which the standpoint is tested against critical reactions and the concluding stage in which the speaker's commitments are reaffirmed or withdrawn. In each of these stages, the discussants will perform specific argumentative moves such as putting forward standpoints, asking critical questions, putting forward argumentation, and requesting definitions. As an ideal model, the critical discussion is meant to offer a systematic basis for the analysis and evaluation of real-life argumentative discourse. In this paper, I will employ the model exclusively for analytical purposes.

Examined through the model of a critical discussion, a thought experiment will appear as a sequence of argumentative moves performed by an antagonist in an

attempt to resolve a difference of opinion concerning the 'targeted' academic claim. For example, Jackson's thought experiment would be reconstructed as a contribution to a discussion on the physicalist claim that all knowledge of the world is, roughly, knowledge of physical particles in motion. The author takes a negative standpoint with respect to this claim, while physicalists presumably maintain their positive standpoint (confrontation stage). The imaginary scenario of Mary the brilliant scientist is then introduced as a common ground for discussing the acceptability of physicalism (opening stage). Jackson then argues, based on what is said to happen in the scenario, that physicalism is unacceptable (argumentation stage). Finally, in a section of the paper that has not been reproduced here, Jackson proposes that the doctrine of physicalism is too rudimentary to cover the many sources of human knowledge, so it should be either significantly modified or altogether retracted (concluding stage). What this short reconstruction shows is that this thought experiment can be reconstructed as a contribution to a process of resolving a difference of opinion. The next step in resolving the above-mentioned puzzles is reconstructing the role of suppositions in such a resolution process. This will amount to specifying

(1) the kind of argumentative moves that are performed based on suppositions,

(2) the stage(s) in which these argumentative moves are performed, and

(3) the contribution of these argumentative moves to the process of resolving the difference of opinion. I propose to distinguish three such argumentative moves.

The first argumentative move that can take one or more suppositions as part of its propositional content is the *proposal of suppositions*. This move is typically performed explicitly and is signalled textually by let's-constructions such as 'let's suppose,' 'let's say,' and 'let's imagine'. Being directive (more precisely: an invitation), the proposal of suppositions will belongs to the opening stage of a resolution process. Its illocutionary point is to have the hearer join the speaker in temporarily discussing as if some propositions, the ones making up the imaginary scenario, are true. For ease of reference, I will represent the set of all introduced suppositions with the variable 'SCENARIO', and the protagonist and antagonist as LU1 and LU2, respectively. The proposal of a supposition can thus be given as the following argumentative move performed by the antagonist (LU2) in the opening stage:

LU2: !/(LU1 & LU2 discuss as if SCENARIO)

The details of how the parties will 'discuss-as-if' will vary from context to context

and need not concern us for the present purposes. Generally, the antagonist (LU2¬) will invite the protagonist (LU1) to temporarily refrain from questioning the truth of the propositions under the set SCENARIO. LU2 is thus trying to establish a discussion rule, a 'formal starting point' that will regulate the discussants' future contributions.**[ii]**

In order for such a formal starting point to be applicable, however, the protagonist (LU1) must also *accept* the antagonist's proposal. The *acceptance of suppositions* is the second argumentative move that must be distinguished. By accepting the proposal, the protagonist is effectively consenting to the discussion rule of discussing as if SCENARIO is true. This can be reconstructed as the performance of a commissive in the opening stage of the resolution process. Following the same formula, the commissive can be represented as follows:

LU1: +/(LU1 & LU2 discuss as if SCENARIO)

It is important to note that neither of the two moves discussed so far needs to be performed explicitly in order for other argumentative moves to follow. Generally, since thought experiments are put forward in monological texts, the antagonist will propose the suppositions and then simply continue his contribution. This is exemplified in Jackson's thought experiment, where the readers' (inevitable) silence is provisionally taken to count as acceptance. A proposal-acceptance sequence performed with respect to a set of suppositions forming a SCENARIO can be referred to as the *introducing* of those suppositions in the discussion.

Introducing suppositions in a discussion can be pragmatically justified only if the proposer means to subsequently use these suppositions in the discussion. Abandoning the 'discussing-as-if' venture after the proposal was accepted would be equivalent to inviting someone to dinner and not showing up – at best, this would suggests a speaker's misuse of the let's-construction (Clark, 1993). It is important then to distinguish a third argumentative move, a move that will be called *using suppositions.* This move is an assertive speech act that contributes to the resolution process because it provides support for the antagonist's standpoint. The move will thus be reconstructed as part of the argumentative stage of the resolution process. In this terminology, to use a scenario in an argumentative discussion means to put forward an argument that contains those suppositions as antecedents.

It follows from the previous analysis that suppositions must appear both in the simple premises of an argument *and* in the bridging premise.**[iii]** This should square well with the intuitive idea that scenario 'works against' the academic claim both because of what the other party says it would happen *and* because of what would 'really' happen. Let us denote the protagonist's standpoint as 'T' and the consequences derived from the scenario as 'c'. The simple and the bridging premises in which suppositions are used can be represented respectively as follows:

LU2: +/(If SCENARIO, then ¬c)
LU2: +/(If T, then if SCENARIO, then c)

Putting forward these two speech acts is not like, say, asking a question and then later asking another question. Rather, the two *taken together* form a complex speech act of argumentation – they are premises of the same argument. In pragma-dialectics, the relation between premises is represented in argumentation structures, which in this case would take the following form:

1. ¬ *T*
1.1 If SCENARIO, then ¬*c*
1.1' If T, then if SCENARIO, then *c*

The double conditional in the bridging premise (1.1') is usually avoided in natural language, partly because of the strange if-then-if-then construction, and partly because it is often obvious that the arguer is labouring under the introduced suppositions. Jackson's thought experiment is a good example. While no if-then-if-then construction appears explicitly, the bridging premise can be reconstructed from the following sequence of assertives: "It seems just obvious that she will learn something about the world and our visual experience of it. But then is it inescapable that her previous knowledge was incomplete. But she had *all* the physical information. *Ergo* there is more to have than that, and Physicalism is false." Taken together, these assertives can be reconstructed in the following structure:

1. ¬ (PHYSICALISM is true)
1.1 If MARY-IN-THE-ROOM SCENARIO, then Mary does learn something new
1.1.1 Mary learns about coloured objects
1.1' If PHYSICALISM, then if MARY-IN-THE-ROOM SCENARIO, then she doesn't

learn anything new

During real-life instances thought experimentation, the simple premise (1.1) is typically questioned implicitly or explicitly by the protagonist, which prompts further argumentation from the antagonist. A more detailed analysis is required for establishing how these more complex structures can best be represented. For the present purposes, it need only be stressed that suppositions can be part of the argumentation stage of an argumentative discussion without necessarily being in the same class of speech acts as assertives. The suppositions (represented by the variable SCENARIO) are part of the antagonist's argumentation, yet only as antecedents, not as premises.

Distinguishing between the proposal, acceptance and use of suppositions as three separate argumentative moves that can be performed in an argumentative discussion is crucial for understanding the argumentative dimension of thought experimentation. Though the distinctions above have been introduced at a rather swift pace, they should be sufficient to throw some light on the two puzzles discussed above.

4. *The two puzzles revisited*
The distinctions introduced in the previous section are not meant to exhaust the topic of suppositions and their functions in argumentative discourse. They do provide a basis for approaching the two puzzles described in section 2. As explained, both puzzles concerned the relationship between thought experimentation and argumentative moves. Before going back to each of the two puzzles and see what insights can be drawn, it might be useful to first delineate the principal points of the solution here proposed.

What the analysis above has indicated is that putting forward a thought experiment commits two speakers to a variety of argumentative moves. The expression 'to put forward a thought experiment' covers in its present usage a more complex form of linguistic behavior than, say, 'to put forward a question' or even 'to put forward an argument'. To engage in thought experimentation means to take part in a structured dialogical process whose aim is (*inter alia*) the resolution of a difference of opinion. Due to various institutional conventions that constrain this process, we can only 'see' the antagonist's moves, the protagonist's moves being quoted, reported or left implicit. The monological performance, however, does not change the argumentative dimension of the antagonist's

behavior. The antagonist is in the position of someone displaying his tangoing skills with an invisible partner: his moves are still *meant* as tango moves even though, as we know, the real process takes two. If the pragma-dialectical model is used to analyze this process, it will be trivial to observe that a thought experiment is not an argument and that supposing is not asserting. With the introduced distinctions, one can also pinpoint more precisely why this should be so.

The first puzzle was brought forth by scholars who disagreed upon the general relationship between thought experimentation and argumentation. In this debate, thought experiments are either arguments, in which case they can be reconstructed as such, or not, in which case the reconstruction must fail on some account. Whatever epistemological assumptions might fuel this dilemma, it does not seem to have a pragmatic basis.**[iv]** The analysis developed here has shown that the texts quoted as instances of thought experimentation are evidently *more than arguments* since two of the argumentative moves identified (the proposal and the acceptance of suppositions) are not assertives. At the same time, the speech acts put forward by the antagonist in the argumentation stage of the discussion are evidently *nothing but arguments* since the illocutionary point of using suppositions is to support the standpoint. Thought experimentation is thus a complex argumentative phenomenon consisting of many argumentative moves performed at different stages of a discussion, all of which realize the point of convincing the other party of the unacceptability of T.

The second puzzle was brought forth by scholars who disagreed upon the relationship between suppositions and argumentation. In the analysis above, suppositions where shown to have a function in various stages of an argumentative discussion. This versatility can be explained technically by pointing out that suppositions are not illocutionary acts. Rather, suppositions are contained in the predication act of various types of illocutionary acts such as directives (when they are proposed), commissives (when they are accepted) and assertives (when they are used). The supposition 'Mary is a brilliant scientist who investigates the world from a black-and-white room' is only part of the propositional content of an illocutionary act such as '(Let's) Suppose Mary is a brilliant scientist who investigates the world from a black-and-white room'. Because of this, the label 'suppositional argument' designates, not an altogether different form of argumentative behavior, but a rather common argumentation structure in which both the simple and the bridging premises are conditional

statements taking suppositions as antecedents.

5. *Conclusion*

Thought experimentation has been analyzed here as a contribution to a process of resolving a difference of opinion. While the reader who is accustomed to the rigid language of scientific communication will perhaps see them as rarities, there is pragmatically speaking nothing strange about engaging in thought experimentation. The antagonist proposes some formal starting points (discussion rules), the protagonist accepts, after which the two make use of the introduced starting points in order to test the acceptability of the standpoint under discussion. While a thought experiment might appear as a monologue, through pragma-dialectical analysis these dialogical processes can be reconstructed. The result of such a reconstruction is that the relationship between the imaginary scenario and the targeted claim becomes clear and the various functions of speech acts containing suppositions can be characterized as argumentative moves in a resolution process.

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i. For an overview of theories that take argumentation to be exclusively a matter of putting forward assertions see Bowels (1993, p. 237).

ii. For the notion of 'formal starting point' see van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1984, p. 84).

iii. The distinction between simple and bridging premises is discussed, in a slightly different terminology, by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984, chapter 6).

iv. One of the first formulations of this dilemma appears in Norton (1991): "Thus there is only one non-controversial source from which this information can come: it is elicited from information we already have by an identifiable argument, although that argument might not be laid out in detail in the statement of the thought experiment. The alternative to this view is to suppose that thought experiments provide some new and even *mysterious* route to knowledge of the physical world" (p. 129, my italics).

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ISSA Proceedings 2014 – Obama And The 2011 Debt Ceiling Crisis: The American Citizen And The Deliberative Power Of the Bully Pulpit

Abstract: During the summer of 2011, Obama was faced with the difficult task of breaking the partisan stalemate in Congress that threatened to plunge the world into another recession. This study examines President Obama's rhetorical strategy during the debt crisis and discusses his extensive use of the bully pulpit.

This paper argues that in the case of the debt ceil crisis the bully pulpit served as a means to restore deliberation to Congress.

1. *Introduction*

During the summer of 2011, President Obama was confronted with a debate that economists labelled as "insane" and dangerous (Jackson, 2011). The issue of raising the debt ceiling, an event that had for years been a formality, became a thorn in the President's side that threatened the economy of not just the U.S., but the world as well. Many experts argued that if the debt ceiling was not raised it could cripple the U.S. economic recovery and plunge the world into another recession (Isidore, 2011).

During the final weeks of July the negotiations between the parties over the debt ceiling reached a breaking point, with both President Obama and House speaker John Boehner walking away from the negotiation table multiple times. Between July 19th and the 29th, at the height of the crisis, President Obama addressed the American people numerous times concerning the debt ceiling debate. During these remarks, President Obama attempted to sway public opinion in favour of a compromise between the two parties. Obama's remarks were by all accounts successful in gaining public support; shifting public opinion away from Republicans who were viewed as hold outs on the debt ceiling (Feldmann, 2011). Citizens' outrage over the issue went so far that many Congressional members' offices were flooded with calls and letters about the debate (Memoli, 2011).

In this essay, I argue that President Obama's rhetoric during the debt ceiling crisis accomplished two things. First, President Obama used constitutive rhetoric to cast American citizens as fundamental elements of decision making concerning the debt ceiling debate, in order to apply pressure on Congress for a resolution for the debt crisis. Second, Obama's use of the Bully Pulpit during the debt debate was aimed at returning the debate to a rational dialog between the two parties. To support these claims, I will first visit the existing literature concerning constitutive rhetoric and the debate surrounding the role of the rhetorical presidency. Next, I describe the context of the debt ceiling. Finally I demonstrate how Obama positioned the American people during the crisis

2. *The rhetorical presidency*

Over the last hundred years, the role of the president has fundamentally changed from a leader of the government to a "leader of the people" (Bessette, Ceaser, Thurow & Tulis, 1981). An example of this change can be seen during the Carter administration when he attempted to address the issue of "malaise" surrounding the nation. Carter believed he needed to take action, and rally the nation as the "leader of the people," in order to revive America's morality (Bessette, Ceaser, Thurow & Tulis, 1981). Though Carter inevitably went back to being what he defined as the "head of the government" later in his presidency, his speech and actions demonstrates how the role of the President has changed over the years. The advent of the Bully Pulpit as a tool for a President can also be traced to the rise of the "Rhetorical Presidency."

The Rhetorical Presidency is a departure from what has been called the "old way" of presidential rhetoric, in which a President would address their rhetoric to Congress almost exclusively in order to pass policies (Bessette, Ceaser, Thurow & Tulis, 1981;Saldin, 2011). With the rise of the Rhetorical Presidency, the presidency now takes a different route that uses rhetoric to sway the public at large in order to pressure Congress (Ivie, 1998; Saldin, 2011; Stuckey, 2006). The emergence of the Rhetorical Presidency began a heated debate in the academic community about its impact on democracy and public deliberation. Some critics argue that the Rhetorical Presidency may derail rational deliberation and discussion through demagoguery (Tulis, 1998). Other critics claim that the Rhetorical Presidency has led to a simplification of debate concerning public policy (Ivie, 1998). Tulis argued that the Rhetorical Presidency threatens to undermine the deliberative role of Congress in favor of appeals to public opinion (2007).

While Tulis (1996) warned that the Rhetorical Presidency has the potential to undermine rational discussion, he acknowledged that the "Bully Pulpit" does have a place in Presidential rhetoric. In particular, Tulis (1996) proposed that the "Bully Pulpit" could be used to break partisan deadlock and restore deliberation. Tulis (1996) explains that recent political times have been gripped with a complete lack of discussion and debate, a conclusion that certainly was an accurate description of the situation that President Obama faced during the debt ceiling crisis. In such a context the president might employ the "Bully Pulpit" in order to pressure Congress so that deliberation could be restored. At the same time, it is possible that a president could use the "Bully Pulpit" to stymie or

prevent deliberation.

In recent years, critics have decried extremism in public debate as it promotes "otherization." In particular, the danger that those with different opinions will be labelled as evil or outside of the bounds of democracy itself (Ivie, 1998, 2002). This clearly happened in the stalemate that occurred during the debt ceiling debate. Where neither side was willing to negotiate, reasoned debate was precluded and those that call for compromise were labelled as soft. Parties were willing to engage in the "nuclear" option of letting the debt ceiling not pass and possibly plunging the world into another economic crisis. In this crisis, however, President Obama was able to sway public opinion in favour of compromise and debate. Through the use of constitutive rhetoric Obama tapped into underlying national and cultural narratives of the American citizen in order to apply pressure on congress to resolve the debt crisis.

3. *Constitutive rhetoric*
One of the avenues that a president has for changing public perception is through the definition or redefinition of terms. Zarefsky argued that presidents have historically created and defined terms that they deem important as a method for shaping public perceptions (2004). One example of this is the use of the term "war" after September 11th by President Bush. President Bush claimed we were at "war" with the terrorists. Technically, such a thing did not occur since war is defined as a conflict between nations and the terrorists had no sovereign nation or what many would define as a military force (Zarefsky, 2004). By redefining the situation as a "war", President Bush was able to create a perception of a war mentality and set the stage for military conflict.

The President's rhetorical power to define is a fundamental part of how constitutive rhetoric functions to form an audience's identity. Zagacki noted that "constitutive rhetorics are crucial during "founding" moments when advocates try to ''interpellate'' or ''hail'' audiences, calling a common, collective identity into existence." (2007, p. 272). Using the power of definition, Presidents can attempt to unite their audiences using narratives that touch cultural, ideological, and national identities in order to move them to action (Stuckey, 2006; Zagacki, 2007). In the case of the debt ceiling debate, I argue that Obama used constitutive rhetoric to cast the American people as a key part of the deliberation process. Using different historical American narratives and values such as self-sacrifice, hard work, and compromise, Obama united American citizens in order

to pressure congress towards rational discussion and a resolution of the debt ceiling crisis.

4. *Debt ceiling debate*

The debt ceiling was originally created in 1917 to allow the Treasury Department to pay expenses for government activities through borrowing without having to submit requests to Congress to approve already allotted spending (Kessler, 2011). Since then, the debt ceiling has been used to pay for government programs ranging from wars to Medicare (Kessler, 2011). However, failure to extend the debt ceiling could cause the government to default on its debt; an action that could drastically affect the world economy.

During the crisis Republicans wanted a debt ceiling deal consisting of spending cuts only, without revenue increases such as taxes being included. Part of the reason Republicans were unwilling to compromise was because many of the freshmen Republican representatives had campaigned on a platform of no new taxes. In addition, some did not believe in the economic doomsday scenarios that many experts were claiming would occur if the ceiling was not raised (Fahrenthold, 2011). This created a crisis for Republican leaders. If a deal was authored with increased revenue provisions, it risked splintering the Republican caucuses. Such a possibility forced the leadership to take a hard line stance on excluding new taxes in the deal. Democrats took a contrasting position, willing to cut spending, but unwilling to accept a deal that didn't include at least some increase in revenue.

Obama gave four separate speeches between the 19th and 29th of July that focused exclusively on the debt situation. It was during these speeches that Obama made his case to the American citizen for the need to take action and make their voices heard concerning the debt ceiling debate. Obama's success in swaying public opinion was noted by many pundits (Benen, 2011; Feldmann, 2011; Mason, 2011). These addresses occurred at the height of the debt ceiling debate and, I argue, are examples of Obama's use of constitutive rhetoric and also demonstrate how the Bully Pulpit can be used to restore rational debate and discussion.

5. *The debt ceiling and the role of the American citizen*

While Obama's use of constitutive rhetoric in relation to the American public reached its height during his address on the 25th of July, the groundwork for the

address was laid days before on the 19th and 22nd. Two key rhetorical moves were made during these addresses. First, Obama attempted to place the American citizen as an active part of the political landscape and not a passive spectator, stating "If both sides continue to be dug in, if we don't have a basic spirit of cooperation that allows us to rise above immediate election-year politics and actually solve problems, then I think markets here, the American people, and the international community are going to start reacting adversely fairly quickly" (Obama, July 19, 2011). This rhetoric placed the American people as active members of the discussion.

This trend of invoking the American citizen as a check on Washington politics emerges again during Obama remarks on July 22nd where he stated: "Now, I'll leave it up to the American people to make a determination as to how fair that is. And if the leadership cannot come to an agreement in terms of how we move forward, then I think they will hold all of us accountable." (Obama, July 22, 2011). This section demonstrates that Obama was using the threat of the Bully Pulpit to bring the parties back together in a deliberative discussion in order to find a compromise on the debt ceiling. The use of the Bully Pulpit to restore deliberation is in line with what Tulis (1996) discussed. Specifically, Tulis argued that Presidents might use the Bully Pulpit to revitalize congressional debate and deliberation (1996).

Second, Obama appealed to shared values to create the communal identity of the American citizen. Obama's rhetoric discusses numerous values ranging from hard work to fairness, but the value that became the core of his definition of the American citizen is that of compromise. Obama states: "What the American people are looking for is some compromise, some willingness to put partisanship aside, some willingness to ignore talk radio or ignore activists in our respective bases, and do the right thing."(Obama, July 22, 2011). In this instance, compromise doesn't seem to meet the criterion established by Charland (1987) for constitutive rhetoric. Constitutive rhetoric generally creates a narrative around ancestral ideologies and cultural values (Charland, 1987; Zagacki, 2007). While in this address compromise was not fleshed out in such a way to show how it is endemic to the American citizen's identity, it was a foreshadowing of Obama's constitutive rhetoric to come.

The July 19th and 22nd remarks were followed by a negotiation breakdown that occurred early on the 25th. This led Obama to deliver an address to the nation

during prime time television to discuss the debt crisis. It is in this address that constitutive rhetoric is clearly used by President Obama in order to unify the American public in the call for a return to negotiations. In particular Obama used his address to create a shared narrative of hardship and ancestry for the American people to reinforce the value of compromise. Through the value of compromise, Obama called on American citizens to take action against partisan politics and resolve the debt ceiling debate. He did this in two distinct ways. The first appeal defined "compromise" as distinctly American. Second, the American public were cast as having a role to play in the resolution of the debt ceiling debate. We can see these arguments begin to develop in the following passage:

They're fed up with a town where compromise has become a dirty word. They work all day long, many of them scraping by, just to put food on the table. And when these Americans come home at night, bone-tired, and turn on the news, all they see is the same partisan three-ring circus here in Washington. They see leaders who can't seem to come together and do what it takes to make life just a little bit better for ordinary Americans. They're offended by that. And they should be. The American people may have voted for divided government, but they didn't vote for a dysfunctional government. (Obama, July 25, 2011)

Obama attempted to cast the frustration felt by the American people as a direct result of the lack of compromise in American politics. He also contrasted the daily grind of the average citizen, a grind that forces citizens to compromise between leisure and work, to the political process. Finally, he provided an outlet for the public's frustration by suggesting that they inform their legislator of their opinions on the crisis.

By linking compromise with the daily life of an American citizen, Obama cast compromise as central to both American politics and what it means to be a citizen. In his view, to be an American is to work together and compromise. President Obama connected compromise to the daily grind and hard work in order to bridge any political barriers in his audience. To reinforce the narrative, Obama drew upon American history to prove why compromise is distinctly American:

America, after all, has always been a grand experiment in compromise…we have put to the test time and again the proposition at the heart of our founding: that out of many, we are one. We've engaged in fierce and passionate debates about

the issues of the day, but from slavery to war, from civil liberties to questions of economic justice, we have tried to live by the words that Jefferson once wrote: "Every man cannot have his way in all things without this mutual disposition, we are disjointed individuals, but not a society. (Obama, July 25, 2011)

Obama used the Founding Fathers, and the history of the country, in order to illustrate how compromise is at the heart of the American identity. This connection between compromise and American history is a prime example of how constitutive rhetoric forms a narrative around cultural and national ideologies (Charland, 1987; Zagacki, 2007). Obama created a narrative that placed the American citizen in a group identity transcending political party identities (Charland, 1987). Constitutive rhetoric creates a feeling of belonging to something that possesses meaning. This transcendence bridges political and ideological differences that might normally create rifts in the audience.

Obama argues that a commitment to compromise is at the core of America, something he highlights in the final two paragraphs of his address:

History is scattered with the stories of those who held fast to rigid ideologies and refused to listen to those who disagreed. But those are not the Americans we remember. We remember the Americans who put country above self, and set personal grievances aside for the greater good. We remember the Americans who held this country together during its most difficult hours; who put aside pride and party to form a more perfect union. That's who we remember. That's who we need to be right now. The entire world is watching. So let's seize this moment to show why the United States of America is still the greatest nation on Earth not just because we can still keep our word and meet our obligations, but because we can still come together as one nation. (Obama, July 25, 2011)

Two key arguments come into focus here. First, Obama connects the past greatness of America with compromise. This is evident with his comment about setting grievances aside and how Americans help each other in times of need. Here, President Obama takes the value of compromise and places it at the heart of the identity of the American citizen. The rise of America had been interwoven into Obama's view of compromise as an integral part of national identity. While Obama's use of compromise becomes the central theme of his narrative about the role of the citizen, he also relies on historical examples. In doing so, Obama counters the political narrative of the Tea Party and others on the right.

5.1 *Contemporary historical examples*

President Obama's narrative about compromise and its relationship to American identity faced a difficult obstacle during the debt ceiling debate, the counter narrative proposed by Republicans. Many Republicans argued that the debt ceiling represented an expansion of government and irresponsible spending which violated American values. In order to combat this, Obama needed to demonstrate that raising the debt ceiling was not against American values and fit with his narrative of compromise.

Obama relied on historical argument for two reasons. First, historical evidence such as quotations from former Republican leaders, like Ronald Reagan, and statistics that spanned multiple Republican administrations made it difficult for the House Republicans to argue against Obama without seeming disconnected from the American public and the Republican Party. The second reason Obama chose these specific pieces of evidence was because they resonated with the Republican base. Reagan and Eisenhower are still seen as heroes by Republicans. If Obama could convince Republicans that the officials they elected were not following Reagan's own directions, he could spur real negotiations. We can see Obama begin to align himself with some of the Republican Party's great leaders in the following example. "The first approach says; let's live within our means by making serious, historic cuts in government spending. Let's cut domestic spending to the lowest level it's been since Dwight Eisenhower was President. Let's cut defence spending at the Pentagon by hundreds of billions of dollars (Obama, July 25th, 2011)."

Here, Obama compares his proposed budget to the policies enacted by Eisenhower. Contrasting his budget proposal with the actions taken by the Eisenhower administration, by association, strengthened his position with Republicans. Moreover, this argument strengthened the narrative created by Obama that compromise is an integral part of American History, by demonstrating that compromise has been a part of past Republican administrations. Obama's attempt to cast the House Republicans as disconnected from the American people is further demonstrated when he discusses the need for a balanced approach to the debt ceiling debate:

The first time a deal was passed, a predecessor of mine made the case for a balanced approach by saying this, "Would you rather reduce deficits and interest rates by raising revenue from those who are not now paying their fair share, or

would you rather accept larger budget deficits, higher interest rates, and higher unemployment? And I think I know your answer." Those words were spoken by Ronald Reagan. *But today, many Republicans in the House refuse to consider this kind of balanced approach an approach that was pursued not only by President Reagan, but by the first President Bush, by President Clinton, by myself, and by many Democrats and Republicans in the United States Senate.* (Obama, July 25, 2011)

Obama turns the iconic figure of the Republican Party, Ronald Reagan, against the House Republicans, thereby casting doubt on whether Republicans in the House truly represent the American people. The contemporary examples cited by Obama are part of a two pronged argument that shows that compromise is not only a basic American value, but also an approach that has been followed by Democrats and Republicans alike.

In sum, Obama used historical evidence to create a wedge between the Republican leadership and the American people in an attempt to pressure the Republicans to return to negotiations. This wedge helped to reinforce the constitutive narrative used by Obama concerning the American citizen. The use of historical evidence created a discontinuity in the narrative put forth by Republicans concerning the debt ceiling and made it look as though Republicans were going against their own values and past leaders. This strengthened Obama's constitutive narrative about the value of compromise.

6. *Conclusion*

For any narrative to resonate within a group of individuals there must be a sense of shared identity and values that connect the members together. In the case of the 2011 debt ceiling debate, President Obama created a narrative for the American citizen that centered on the values of compromise and deliberation, a narrative he grounded in American history. Through the value of compromise, Obama constituted the American citizen as champions of rational discussion and placed the American citizen in a position to restore those values to Congress.

The 2011 debt ceiling debate also shows that President Obama's use of the Bully Pulpit was not an attempt to disrupt reason as some theorists might contend, but was instead an attempt to restore deliberation and discussion to Congress. Similar to what Tulis (1996) had described as a possible role for the rhetorical Presidency, Obama's use of the Bully Pulpit attempted to break the partisan

gridlock that had prevented deliberation on the debt ceiling. Throughout the addresses, Obama stressed the need for discussion and negotiation with both sides. It is important to recognize that Obama did not limit compromise to only one side of the political spectrum, but instead asked for both Democrats and Republicans to be willing to sacrifice in order to pass the Debt Ceiling.

Obama's rhetoric during the debt ceiling crisis is an example of an effort to transcend the bounds of party politics and invoke the national identity of the American citizen as a tool for political reform. President Obama used the Bully Pulpit, not to derail deliberation and rational thought, but instead to reinforce them. Obama's support of compromise reflected a view of democracy based in public opinion.

In this study I demonstrated how the Bully Pulpit can be a tool in restoring deliberation and reason to policy making discussions. There is evidence that Obama's message, at minimum, moved the public to apply pressure on Congress to return to the negotiating table and is possibly partly responsible for helping find a compromise to raise the debt ceiling in 2011. The debt ceiling debate, as an example of partisan politics at their peak when all other negotiation strategies have failed, indicates that the Bully Pulpit can be used to restore deliberation and rational debate instead of stifling it as some scholars feared.

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ISSA Proceedings 2014 – Karl Popper's Influence On Contemporary Argumentation Theory

Abstract: Karl Popper's influence, from the nineteen sixties to the nineteen eighties, over the dialectical schools of contemporary argumentation theory (namely pragma-dialectics and formal dialectic) is often evoked by some of these schools (as is the case of the first one). It appears suggested, at least at first sight, through a comparison between Poppers's critical rationalism and the relevant normativist conceptions. The author analyses and explores in detail all of these historical and philosophical connections.

Keywords: argumentation, critical rationalism, descriptivism, formal dialectic, normativism, Popper, pragma-dialectics.

1. *Introduction: popper's influence and its limits*
Karl Popper is one of the most brilliant philosophers of the 20th century. His influence on philosophy in general, and science in particular, is well-known. Compared to others such as Toulmin or Perelman (see Ribeiro, 2009), however,

Popper's influence (and of his disciple, Hans Albert) on rhetoric and argumentation theory during that period has yet to be studied and analysed. It is occasionally pointed out by some schools, like pragma-dialectics (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, pp. 16-17, 51). I say "occasionally" because – as far as I know – it has never been truly assessed in the detail and depth that would be expected, which is what we will attempt to do in this paper.

The absence of the studies and research I have alluded to is presumably due to the following: we know that Popper wrote profusely about argumentation, that this was even one of the main facets of what this philosopher called "critical rationalism" (see Musgrave, 2007; and Bouveresse, 1981, pp. 143-163), but the fact is that he never developed an actual argumentation theory as a (more or less) *specialised field of research*, and least of all an argument theory, i.e. a theory about what constitutes an argument, its "form" and/or "structure'", and the way its elements relate to each other (on the distinction between "argumentation theory" and "argument theory", see van Eemeren, Grootendorts, Henkemans et al., 1996, p. 12ff.; and Johnson, 2000, pp. 30-31). Which is why his influence on contemporary argumentation theory – however significant it may be – has possibly little to do with this, i.e., *a technical view of argumentation and arguments in particular*. Therefore, while addressing such influence I do not have in mind a direct impact of Popper's philosophy, even if such impact actually existed – and today we have every reason to believe that it did someway exist, since the fact has been acknowledged, namely in the case of pragma-dialectics (see van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, pp. 16-17). In other words, and methodologically speaking: it is not a question here – in this paper – of the main schools of argumentation theory (the dialectic schools, like pragma-dialectics and formal dialectic, and the others, such as the so-called school of "informal logic") expressly *adapting* or *applying* Popper's theories to their own individual scopes. Instead, the aforementioned schools regarded these theories as brilliant philosophical confirmations of their conceptions of argumentation, and even, to some extent, as their overall framework. It is from this perspective, in my view, that pragma-dialectics appears – in the text quoted above – as "an extended version of the Popperian critical perspective." (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 17) Based on this fundamental presupposition, we can establish a parallel, or even a rather essential connection, between Popper's philosophy and the conceptions alluded to, in particular the ones of the dialectical schools. Both have a timeframe, they are products of one and the same era, historically and philosophically speaking,

as is the case of the second half of the 20th century; in fact, to not be able to establish that parallel or connection is what would be most surprising. My paper is organised in the following manner:

1. first, I will analyse the model submitted by Popper for science in Popper (1959/1974), and in other works immediately after (Popper, 1945, 1963/1991, 1972), and suggest the implication thereof for contemporary argumentation theory;
2. then I will seek to analyse and discuss in detail each such implication, under what we could call, albeit with some hesitation and doubts, "Popper's argumentation theory";
3. to conclude, I will highlight the original features and, particularly, the limitations and shortcomings of that theory, in the present and more general context of the originality, limitations and shortcomings of contemporary argumentation theory itself.

2. *Popper's argumentative model of science*
Popper's conception of argumentation is addressed through his philosophy of science in Popper (1959/1974) – a book first published in German in 1934 and translated into English in 1959. (This was his third book in English language, after Popper (1945), and Popper (1957).) The essence of the link between science and argumentation in this book involves rejecting the criterion of demarcation between science and metaphysics introduced by logical positivism during its time, in other words, the idea that, in contrast with philosophical and/or metaphysical theories (or hypotheses), the theories of science (i.e. physical-natural sciences, maths included) can be empirically verified and/or entirely corroborated (Popper, 1959/1974, pp. 34-39). On the contrary, Popper finds that such criterion is legitimised on the following grounds: theories or hypothesis are *metaphysical* if they cannot be conclusively refuted or falsified; they are, otherwise, *scientific* if this can be done successfully (Popper, 1959/1974, pp. 40-48). This new criterion resulted in a discussion and controversy, in philosophical terms, which is not called for here. Its relationship with argumentation and critical thought, from a dialectical standpoint, is obvious: when we argue, what actually happens is that we seek to falsify or deny a claim that has been submitted to discussion. This is, I repeat, what dialectical schools of argumentation theory (such as pragma-dialectics and formal dialectics) upheld in the late nineteen-eighties. From this perspective, Popper's basic logical model of critical rationalism in Popper

(1959/1974) is the *modus tollens*, not *the modus ponens* of logical positivism and science philosophy: it involves denying, refuting the implications or the consequences of any theory and/or hypothesis (the consequent thereof), in order to deny/refute its pressupositions (its antecedent). As I will show ahead, Popper does not address that model in social, cultural and political terms in Popper (1959/1974), although he broadly suggests that this may and must be done. Such conception does not appear until Popper (1945). In this book, he defines his "critical rationalism" in the following terms:

(…) In order therefore to be a little more precise, it may be better to explain rationalism in terms of practical attitudes of behaviour. We could then say that rationalism is an attitude of readiness to listen to critical arguments and to learn from experience. It is fundamentally an attitude of admitting that *'I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort, we may get near to the truth'*. It is an attitude which does not lightly give up hope that by such means as argument and careful argumentation, people my reach some kind of agreement on most problems of importance. In short, the rationalist attitude, or, as I may perhaps label it, the 'attitude of reasonableness', is very similar to the scientific attitude, to the belief that in the search for truth we need co-operation, and that, with the help of argument, we can attain something like objectivity. (Popper, 1945, vol. II, pp. 212-213)

Now, the consequences of the new criteria for the demarcation between science and metaphysics, in *The logic of scientific discovery*, were deep and revolutionary: Popper – assuming that in the past scientists had always pursued in their research, more or less consciously, his principle of falsification (which is far from being clear or evident) – proposed that the science of his time (in this case, classical mechanics, thermodynamics, quantum mechanics, and the theory of relativity) be completely reconstructed, from bottom to top according to that principle; in other words, as he retrospectively acknowledges in his intellectual autobiography (Popper, 1976, p. 87ff.) the theory and practice of that science required complete recasting. In *The logic of scientific discovery* he states: "what is to be called 'science' and who is to be called 'scientist' must always remain a matter of convention or decision." (Popper, 1959/1974, p. 52) This has to do with Popper's conventionalism and normative outlook on science. Popper finds that the true scientific method is composed of a set of conventions or basic rules to be adopted by the scientific community or communities in the light of the principle of

falsification, i.e. of fundamentally negative conventions or rules (cf. Popper, 1959/1974, pp. 53-56). These are not logical conventions, as in positivism in Popper's time, but rather epistemological conventions which are enormously significant from that perspective, because ultimately and in the light of that principle, in his view, science is a social, cultural and political phenomenon. On the other hand, while these conventions are agreed freely among scientists – as has been mentioned – they underpin (and have always underpinned) current scientific theory and practice in an essential and substantial way. The originality of Popper's epistemology, seen from the dialectical perspective of argumentation, resides in the following:

1. Science (just as everyday language) is a social phenomenon.
2. It is more relevant, as a methodology of scientific research, to deny and/or to refute ("It is not true that..."), than to seek to verify or to corroborate, because, as Popper puts it, one can never verify nor corroborate completely a given theory or hypothesis (Popper, 1959/1974, p. 40ff.) The same applies to the role of refutation in argumentative discourse overall.
3. It is by violating the aforementioned rules that we may ultimately distinguish between a "normal" – or "correct" – scientific practice and another allegedly "abnormal", fallacious or metaphysical one (Popper 1959/1974, p. 53ff.). The same is true of the rules governing argumentative discourse in general, or the rules of what van Eemeren & Grootendorts (2004, pp. 21-22), call "the ideal model of critical discussion".
4. As already said, these rules are not logical conventions, i.e. conventions based on the requirements of formal logic, but rather epistemological (cf. Popper, 1972, pp. 30-31); they entail the intersubject agreement between stakeholders, i.e., scientists (as is the case in argumentative discourse of the rules governing a discussion of a claim at stake between parties).
5. It is necessary to reread or reconstruct all current scientific discourse and practice in the light of rules like these (or, if you prefer, it is necessary to reread or reconstruct argumentative discourse in each one of its institutional contexts in the light of rules like these, whatever they may be).

There is no question that, from these five viewpoints, one can trace a tight link between critical rationalism and the dialectical schools, namely, the normativist conceptions of argumentation developed by Barth and Krabbe (1982), Walton (1989), Walton & Krabbe (1995), and van Eemeren & Grootendorst's (2004). In

Walton (1989, pp. 17-18), for example, the rules of "persuasion dialogue" (i.e., argumentative discourse) are explicitly presented as negative, following a Popperian view on science, society and politics; fallacies (in Popper's demarcation criterion: metaphysics, or the "bad science") result from their violation; and in order to understand argumentation in daily life (and the specific dialogues in which it occurs), as for understanding science in Popper, we must reconstruct it precisely according to this kind of rules.

In pragma-dialectics, Popper's legacy (and that of his disciple, Hans Albert), and in particular the contribution of the aforementioned aspects to argumentation theory, involves – as we started off by saying in the introduction – identifying that theory with the philosopher's "critical rationalism"; furthermore, such legacy is expressly acknowledged and interpreted – in a way which we cannot analyse nor discuss here – in the light of Toulmin's (1976) pioneering distinction between three essential types of approaches to that theory (the geometrical or logical, the anthropological and the critical). Having in mind what was summarised above in (3), (4) and (5) about the status of the rules for critical discussion, van Eemeren and Grootendorts state:

The critical perspective of reasonableness combines certain insights from the geometrical and anthropological perspectives with insights advanced by critical-rationalists such as Karl Popper (…) and Hans Albert (1967/1975). By proposing a discussion procedure in the form of an orderly arrangement of independent rules for rational discussants who want to act reasonably, the aim of formalization is reminiscent of the geometrical approach to reasonableness. This formal procedure in the critical sense, however, is aimed at facilitating a discussion intended to resolve a difference of opinion. The proposed procedural rules are valid as far as they really enable the discussants to resolve their difference of opinion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 16).

Further down they substantiate:

In order to have a suitable medium for discussion, or at least a suitable frame of reference (or 'ideal model') for discussing the quality of argumentation, we must detach ourselves from various problematic peculiarities of ordinary language use and introduce new conventions. In our terminology, this is called the *critical-rationalistic* view on reasonableness, which is in fact an extended version of the Popperian critical perspective. (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004, p. 17).

3. *A sketch of popper's argumentation theory*

Let us call the scientific model summarised above an "argumentative model" of science. Popper had the honour of introducing it for the first time in the history of Western philosophical thought. (An argumentation model, in general, is said to have been conceived in Toulmin (1958); yet the philosopher never really addressed the topic of agumentation in science. One could say the same about Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (2008); but Perelman's outlook is essentially that of rhetoric, not of argumentation theory itself.) Unfortunately, Popper is seldom quoted by historiography specialised in these matters, unlike Toulmin and Perelman. In Popper (1945), Popper (1957) and Popper (1963/1991), he applies the alluded outlook on culture, society and politics, under the broader scope of a reconstructed history of Western philosophical thought from ancient Greece (pre-Socratic philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle) up to nowadays. Popper (1972) is a development of Popper' views on the theory of knowledge. It is in Popper (1945) that the expression "critical rationalism" came up for the first time to refer to Popper's own conceptions (cf. vol. II, pp. 217, 224). The core idea regarding argumentation theory is essentially the same in all of the mentioned books, although there are some details one must address and analyse.

1. Human reason is mostly argumentative and conjectural: it consists of trying to challenge and finally refuting, under any of its scopes, a given theory or hypothesis, that is, any claim submitted to us, while keeping oneself intellectually and ethically available to take the challenge or refutation through to the end; this is what "arguing" means to Popper (cf. Popper 1945, vol. II, p. 212ff.; 1963/1991, p. 33ff.; 1972, p. 1 ff.) Popper does not look into the detail of how that, i.e. the challenge and refutation, may and should be done *outside the scientific field*; which suggests, as I will explain ahead, that he is not interested in an argumentation theory by itself, or even less in a theory of argument.

2. As it is argumentative and conjectural, it is not a dogmatic and authoritarian reason, but rather an essentially open one, sceptical yet humble, and optimistic as regards the possibility for deciding, finally, in face of opposing and apparently indisputable arguments.

3. Which means that it is not a speculative reason, in the traditional sense of the concept – of Plato and Aristotle, Hegel and Marx. It is not a "superior" and "legislative" faculty, with which one could intellectually build social, cultural and political institutions, or on which to impose rather ideal models and foresee the

history of societies (historicism).

4. Nor is it a "collectivist" reason, like that of the aforementioned philosophers, but a different one, mostly individual, open and tolerant, in ethical and/or moral terms.

5. History, as the philosopher will tell using a brilliant and revolutionary formula, "has no meaning" (Popper, 1945, vol. II, p. 246ff; cf. Popper, 1957, p. 105ff.).

From the perspective of this last fundamental thesis, Popper is lead to reject and deconstruct, philosophically speaking, all political ideologies, which include supporting the models I have alluded to. He places major emphasis on that thesis, which is understandable, after assimilating adequately the idea (developed in Popper, 1945) that what we call "reason" in philosophy, since the Greek philosophers, is/was also a social, cultural and political reason, and that this very reason lead to the apparent meltdown of Western civilisation as a whole, as the last two World Wars of the 20th century suggest. Hereunder, as under other topics, an analogy could be traced between Popper, who as we know was Austrian and received Viennese education, and Toulmin or, rather, the way Toulmin read the Austro-Hungarian society in the last quarter of the 19th century and the early 20th century, in books like Toulmin & Janik (1974).

4. *Conclusions: on the contribution of philosophy to argumentation theory*
I have suggested that only with some reservations or limitations can one talk about an argumentation theory in Popper's philosophy. We are not dealing here exactly with argumentation – i.e., *a more or less specialised field of research that can be studied separately -,* but rather with rationality (or with exercising human reason) generally speaking. This explains why the philosopher never devised an argumentation model *per se*, unlike what happened in the 20th century with others, like Toulmin (1958) and, to some extent, Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (2008); and, consequently, why we do not find in him a theory of argument, in other words a theory about the way arguments, in general, may be analysed, assessed and represented. The only explanation I find for this situation is that Popper assumed that philosophy could not be reduced, nor likened overall to '"rhetoric" (as it was called in their time, based on the different outlooks of each of them, Perelman on one side and Toulmin on the other) and/or to an argumentation theory. (I have supported in Ribeiro (2012), controversially, that reducing and/or likening it to rhetoric is one of the main outcomes of the author's

inputs, which I have mentioned, to that which we call today "argumentation theory".) He always believed, from Popper (1959/1974) onwards, and specially after the collapse of Western philosophy overall announced and celebrated in Wittgenstein, Kuhn and Quine's main works in the sixties and seventies (Wittgenstein, 1953/2001; Kuhn, 1962; Quine, 1969), that it was possible to work in philosophy following the classical patterns of what in the past (until the late 20th century) we called, for example, "philosophy of science" (see Popper, 1994, pp. 33-64). Regarding this issue, he does not agree with the Toulmin we know, particularly with Toulmin (2001).

Anyhow, the impact of Popper's "critical rationalism" from the second half of the 20th century to the present was enormous, although – as I have suggested – it was essentially diffuse. Such impact could have been deeper and more decisive had Popper, during the second half of the 20th century, not been the outspoken enemy of what we still call nowadays "analytical philosophy", and had not been completely ostracised by it (as actually happened to Toulmin). The biggest contribution of that critical rationalism to contemporary argumentation theory and to what, generally speaking, we call today "critical thinking" was that it showed emphatically that human reason is mostly dialogical and argumentative, that it is something that is (always) under construction, and is not a finished and definitive essence. Therefore, it largely destroyed, practically for the first time in the history of Western philosophy, the myth according to which both science and society are "essences", whose nature we should describe and analyse. From this perspective, Popper's falsificationism and conventionalism, regarding philosophy of science, is clearly compatible with the dialectical schools of contemporary argumentation theory; specially, in the case of pragma-dialectics, because it is/was not a topic of logic or of any kind of science philosophy subordinated to it, as was the case of logical positivism in his time. And this philosopher's conception of society (sceptical, but in the end essentially optimistic), as an ever open place for arguing, discussing and criticising, is clearly in line with today's general conceptions, in particular with those that feed into the schools mentioned above.

Anyhow, Popper's legacy draws our attention to what I have called provocatively, elsewhere and in another time, the "divorce between philosophy and argumentation theory" (Ribeiro, 2012a). Karl Popper, like Jürgen Habermas for example (see Habermas, 1984, 1987), is strongly convinced of the fundamental importance of argumentation for contemporary philosophy; this conception – as

he shows in the forties already in Popper (1945) – is broad, because it involves a more general conception of human reason and its role in the evolution of European and Western societies from the classical Greeks to the present day. However, he clearly does not have, in fact as Habermas himself did not have, a *theory of the argument itself*. All of which explains why both philosophers are hardly ever mentioned and appreciated as they deserve to be in 20th century historiographies of rhetoric and argumentation. In contrast, however, the main contemporary argumentation schools strongly and convincingly uphold conceptions about argumentation theory without these being based upon philosophical and, particularly, metaphysical pressupositions, like those which are disputed by these philosophers. The study of these pressupositions is absolutely essential if we intend to safeguard in the future – on sound ground – the so-called "interdisciplinarity" of argumentation theory. To ensure the desired success of such interdisciplinarity, it must be built on a founding matrix; and, the way I see it, *only philosophy could deliver it* – but certainly in very different terms from those of the past (see Ribeiro, 2013). To conclude my paper, I would say that this is perhaps the most important lesson that we may draw today of Popper's views on argumentation.

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ISSA Proceedings 2014 – The Sequester And Debt Ceiling Talks Of 2013: A Case-Study Of The Liberal Public Sphere

Abstract: Liberal public sphere theory can be used to test the functionality of debate in the American public sphere. Four actors each play a crucial role: the representatives of the public, the public, the media, and the expert community. Application of liberal public sphere theory to the long-running debate about budget cuts and the debt ceiling that dominated American domestic politics for most of 2013 reveals a deeply dysfunctional liberal public sphere.

1. *Introduction*

Budget policy and the debt ceiling have been the focus of several political controversies in the United States over the last five years. In fact, there were four debt ceiling crises in a three year period (Lowrey, 2014, February 7, B1), despite the absolute consensus that failing to extend the debt ceiling could produce a global crisis (Woodward, 2012, 188, 220; Lowry & Popper, 2013, October 14, A1). Leaders in business and finance, often allies of Republicans on fiscal issues, agreed with this judgment and as the crisis escalated in October 2013 the stock market experienced "the worst two-day dip . . . in months" (Lowrey & Popper, 2013, October 14, A14). A chief executive at Deutsche Bank said that if there was a default it was not possible to "come up with measures that would significantly stem the losses," because default "'would be a very rapidly spreading fatal disease'" (Lowrey & Popper, 2013, October 14, A14). The characterization of the crisis as a potentially "fatal disease" is a strong indication of the threat it posed.

The resolution of the crisis should not have been difficult since the debt ceiling had been extended on more than 75 occasions under both Republican and Democratic presidents and before 2011 there had never been any serious risk of default (Harwood, 2011, p. A11; Mann & Ornstein, 2012, pp. 5-7; Popper, 2013, October 4, A21). Moreover, increasing the debt ceiling did not actually result in any additional spending, but only guaranteed that spending which Congress had authorized would be paid for. In addition, unlike 2011, the long-term Federal deficit was shrinking rather than expanding in the fall of 2013. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reported that "Since 2010, projected ten-year deficits" had "shrunk by almost $5.0 trillion," with "77 percent of the savings" from program cuts (Kogan & Chen, 2014, 1). There also was a general expert consensus as stated in multiple national commissions that long-term action to put the nation's fiscal house in order required both expanded revenues and reform of entitlements, precisely the general approach being offered by the president (Mann & Ornstein, 2012, 15-16).

The government shutdown and debt ceiling crises of fall 2013 and early 2014 would seem to provide a perfect case to test the functioning of American democratic decision making. The issues being debated had been resolved successfully many times previously, there was absolute consensus on the dangers associated with a failure to act, and a previous crisis only two years before had

produced substantial negative economic impacts ("Million Jobs," 2013, February 3, A18). There also was a consensus among policy experts on the best way forward, a consensus that would require both liberals and conservatives to make significant compromises. Given these factors, it would seem that preventing a government shutdown and raising the debt ceiling should not have been difficult. And yet in the crises of October 2013 and February 2014, the United States came perilously close to default on two different occasions.

2. *The liberal public sphere*

The most appropriate means of examining the twin crises is with liberal public sphere theory (Rowland 2003, 2005, 2006, 2010, 2012, 2013). Until recently, public sphere research in argumentation was shaped almost exclusively by theories developed by Jürgen Habermas (1989) and then applied by Goodnight (1982, 1992), Calhoun (1992a, 1992b, 1993), and other scholars. However, recent scholarship has focused on what Rob Asen and Dan Brouwer label "a multiplicity of dialectically related public spheres rather than a single, encompassing arena of discourse" (2001, 6). Given the many actors involved in public debate and the variety of arenas in which this debate occurs this evolution is understandable. Moreover, Habermas developed his theory out of a focus on European coffee house culture of the 17th and 18th centuries and therefore a kind of politics and culture very different from the contemporary United States.

While the value of a focus on multiple spheres, publics, and counterpublics is obvious, sometimes the issue is not how argument worked in a particular case but how it functioned for the whole. Nicholas Garnham writes "There must be a single public sphere" in cases where the society is "faced with the unavoidable problem of translating debate into action" (1992, 371). Habermas himself observed that "There are problems that are inescapable and can be solved only in concert. Who, then makes up the concert?" (1992, 467). Liberal public sphere theory isolates the key agents that make up that "concert" and also provides a means of assessing the debate on issues that impact the whole.

In addition to focusing on the whole rather than the part, liberal public sphere theory provides an appropriate means for considering the debate on American fiscal policy because it is rooted in foundational works justifying American democracy. The most important source for understanding the ideas behind the American liberal public sphere is James Madison (1999), who was the primary drafter of the Constitution and Bill of Rights and one of the two main authors of

the Federalist Papers. In the most famous of those short essays, Federalist 10, Madison laid out the essential idea of the liberal public sphere when he said that the key was to construct a system of governance that created "a republican remedy for the diseases most incident to republican government" (1999, 167). Unlike Habermas who according to Calhoun believed that "rational argument was the sole arbiter of any issue" (1992b, 13), Madison was a realist who understood that politics would always involve conflict, passion, self-interest, and irrationality. He noted in Federalist 10 that "As long as the reason of man continues fallible and he is at liberty to exercise it, different opinions will be formed," a situation that could produce decisions based in a "fractious spirit" that would result in politics serving the interest of faction, rather than the common interest and decisions that "tainted our public administration" (1999, 161). Madison also recognized that political leaders would themselves be both the leaders of and dependent on factions and that in such a circumstance it was inevitable that "public measures are rarely investigated with that spirit of moderation which is essential to a just estimate of their real tendency to advance or obstruct the public good" (Federalist 37, 1999, 194). Based on a close analysis of his thought Richard Matthews argues that Madison believed that "individual and collective tendencies toward the irrational were . . . multifaceted and powerful" (1995, 23).

Despite recognizing the dangers posed by special interests, irrationality and other aspects of human fallibility, Madison still believed that "over the long run . . . cool and calculated rational argument would win out over passion and hyperbole" (Mathews, 1995, 144). His faith came from the power of free and open debate, what he called the "republican remedy." Over time, he believed that better ideas would triumph over inferior ones as long as "counterfeit" (1999, p. 501) public opinion did not short circuit the process of public discussion.

For Madison's faith in the "republican remedy" to be justified, four key actors in the liberal public sphere must each do their job. The actors – the representatives of the public, the public, the expert community, and the media – each play a role in achieving the key functions of the liberal public sphere: representing all sides in debate on an issue and ultimately choosing a policy that is consistent with democratic governance and also sensible. If the liberal public sphere works, the four actors all present their views and the ultimate decision is made by the public acting through their representatives. However, in Madison's view, simply representing all views was not sufficient; the system also needed to come to

reasonable decisions (Federalist 37, 1999, 196). This point was made in the preamble of the Constitution where the new system was justified "in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty."

What then must the four actors do to make the system work? The representatives of the public are found in the legislative, executive, other government agencies, and any other body that makes policy. Their function is to strongly present the views of various groups in society in a way that authentically represents their understanding of the facts about any given issue. Thus, for the system to work, all relevant views must be presented in a way that balances faction against faction, but the views must be based in genuine argument, not an inauthentic statement of self-interest or ideology. When representatives of the public base policy on ideology, rather than the best available arguments, the liberal public sphere cannot function, because ideology is immune from refutation.

Madison did not expect the public to participate in the kind of purely rational debate described by Habermas. But for the system to work, the public must pay enough attention to any given controversy to recognize when better ideas emerge. Members of the public also may participate in any debate, but unlike some modern advocates for deliberative democracy, Madison did not expect that such participation would be the norm.

Unlike Goodnight (1982), Fisher (1984), and other contemporary scholars who have pointed to the danger of expert usurpation of the role of the public, the liberal public sphere is based in recognition that on complex issues it is folly to ignore the specialized knowledge present in expert communities. In the fiscal debates of 2013-2014, for example, it was crucial that the public understood the real danger that a default could have catastrophic effects on the global economy. The fourth actor in the liberal public sphere is the media, which fulfills the function of informing the public about all sides of the debate and also about the specialized knowledge of the expert community.

The foregoing description of the roles played by the key actors in turn suggests criteria for evaluating the degree to which the liberal public sphere fulfills its functions in any given case. The success of Madison's "republican remedy" can be assessed by asking five questions:

1. Were the views of all significant stakeholders presented in the debate?

2. Was the debate shaped by informed expert opinion? It is especially important that expert opinion be included in the debate on issues that are largely outside the experience of ordinary people and on which there is consensus.

3. Did the media report the dispute in a way that informed the public on the issue?

4. Did the public as a whole gather adequate information to assess the debate?

5. Did the better arguments in some sense win out in the end? While it is not always possible to make a principled choice among policy positions, there are cases such as global warming, where there is a broad consensus among those with significant knowledge of the issue that action is required.

In what follows, I describe the evolution of the fiscal crises of fall 2013 and winter of 2014 and then evaluate the resolution based on liberal public sphere theory. It seems clear that Madison's faith in the "republican remedy" would have been shaken by the development and resolution of the crisis.

3. *The crisis*

The twin crisis in 2013 and 2014 developed out of the 2011 budget agreement. In order to resolve the 2011 crisis, President Obama and Democrats in the Congress agreed to $1.2 trillion in cuts in spending over nine years that would be automatically triggered if a super committee of Republicans and Democrats were unable to come up with a plan to reduce the deficit by that amount. When the committee failed to agree to a plan, the mandatory cuts, half in domestic programs and half in defense, went into effect (Khimm, S., 2012, September 14).

The crisis of 2013-2014, which the New York Times called the "annual Republican crisis," occurred because after the Democratically controlled Senate passed a budget plan that would have replaced the sequester "with a mix of revenue increases and less-harmful cuts" ("The Annual Republican Crisis," 2013, September 15, SR 10), the Republican led House rejected that plan and attempted to use budget cuts to defund the Affordable Care Act. The plan to defund the Affordable Care Act was agreed to by "more than three dozen conservative groups," who endorsed "a take-no-prisoners legislative strategy," that one leader described as "a fight we were going to pick" (Stolberg & McIntire, 2013, October 6, A1). The cause of the crisis was not the deficit, which not only posed no immediate threat to the economy, but as noted earlier had shrunk substantially since 2010. Nor was it that Obama did not recognize that a long-term deal was

still needed to stabilize the debt. Obama emphasized a willingness to negotiate a long-term budget deal, but not to negotiate over the debt ceiling, stating "we can't make extortion routine as part of our democracy" (Qtd. in Kumar and Douglas, 2013, A17). He consistently advocated a "grand bargain" in which a combination of program cuts, entitlement reform, tax reform, and tax increases would produce "$4 trillion in savings in 10 years" (Calmes, 2013, October 13, A14).

The main players in the crisis took quite different argumentative approaches. The Obama administration focused their advocacy around five points. Obama's first argument was that it was the obligation of Congress to both fund the government and to pay the nation's debts. In a short address prior to the shutdown, the president stated, "the most basic Constitutional duty Congress has is passing a budget." At the end of this statement, addressing the debt ceiling, he said, "The United States of America is not a deadbeat nation" (2013, September 21). He made similar statements on a number of occasions.

Obama also argued that using the threat of shutdown and debt default to force concessions was illegitimate. In a press conference on October 1st, he observed that "one faction of one party in one house of Congress in one branch of government shut down major parts of the government all because they didn't like one law." He went on to label their actions as "an ideological crusade" and stated plainly, "I will not negotiate over Congress responsibility to pay bills it's already racked up" (2013, October 1). Essentially, Obama was making the same argument that Paul Krugman had made repeatedly that what was going on was "blackmail . . . threatening to bring the federal government, and maybe the whole economy to its knees unless . . . demands were met" (2013, September 20, A27).

The third point was a strong argument that the shutdown was harming the nation and failing to raise the debt ceiling risked a real economic catastrophe. A good example is a statement on the White House Blog that cited five different negative economic impacts from the 2011 crisis to indicate the dangers in failing to extend the debt ceiling. The blog then quoted from seven Republican leaders in Congress and the Chamber of Commerce to argue that "it would be reckless and irresponsible to use the threat of default as a bargaining chip" (Brundage, 2013, September 19). The president fleshed out the argument in more depth in a press conference, where he focused on the harms that the shutdown was having and the risks of default (2013, October 1).

Fourth, the president continued to make it clear that he was willing to negotiate on fiscal reform and other issues as long as Republicans understood that a negotiation meant give and take from both sides. He said "I'm happy to talk with him [Speaker Boehner] and other Republicans about anything – not just issues I think are important but also issues that they think are important," but added that "negotiations shouldn't require hanging the threats of a government shutdown or economic chaos over the American people" (2013, October 8).

Finally, he spoke about how the crisis reflected a damaged political system. In a statement immediately after the government was reopened, but before the debt ceiling was resolved, he said "how business is done in this town has to change" and then added that "the American people don't see every issue the same way. But that doesn't mean we can't make progress. And when we disagree, we don't have to suggest that the other side doesn't love this country or believe in free enterprise, or all the other rhetoric that seems to get worse every single year. If we disagree on something, we can move on and focus on things we agree on, and get some stuff done" (2013, October 17).

In contrast to Obama who cited a great deal of evidence and appealed to basic democratic values, the proponents of the shutdown largely ignored fiscal issues and the arguments made by the president and instead presented a set of arguments that might best be described with the phrase "ideological solidarity." Again and again, Tea Party Republicans, including Senator Ted Cruz of Texas labeled the Affordable Care Act as a "nightmare." Cruz added, "ObamaCare is causing health insurance premiums to skyrocket all over this country. ObamaCare is jeopardizing the health care for millions of Americans, threatening that they will lose their health insurance altogether" (2013, September 27, S6988). Notably, Cruz cited no supporting evidence for claims that as I note later simply were untrue.

Advocates of the shutdown such as Cruz also called for continued commitment by conservative activists to the showdown with the president. In a press conference, Senator Cruz bizarrely said that "the Washington establishment is refusing to listen to the American people." He also praised the actions of the House of Representatives as "a bold stance, listening to the American people" (2013, October 16a). Cruz added that he wished for "a world in which Senate Republicans united to support House Republicans" (2013, October 16b, S6988). Here, Cruz wildly mischaracterized public opinion to call for solidarity among

conservative activists.

While activists were implementing this rhetoric of solidarity, more mainstream conservatives were distancing themselves from the crisis. Representative and former vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan blamed the president for "giving Congress the silent treatment." He claimed that the crisis could actually "be a breakthrough" to pass "common-sense reforms of the country's entitlement programs and tax codes" (2013, October 9, A15). In other words, the crisis could end if the president were willing to agree to half of the grand bargain, the half that Ryan and other conservatives wanted.

Some mainstream conservatives who were no longer in Congress recognized the folly of a strategy based in political blackmail. Former Senator Judd Gregg labeled the arguments of those advocating confrontation as "self-promotional babble" and added that it had "become the mainstream of Republican political thought." He noted that default was not an option because "You cannot in politics take a hostage you cannot shoot." He observed that those supporting a shutdown "are folks who have never governed" and then added "Most Americans do not seek purity; they seek answers to the everyday problems they confront. They expect their government to be of assistance in addressing those problems, not to aggravate them" (2013, September 23).

Little meaningful clash occurred between the multiple sides in the dispute. President Obama laid out a strong case. Proponents of the confrontation not only did not respond to this case, but largely ignored fiscal issues, including the danger of default, that were the genesis of the crisis.

4. *Evolution of the crisis*
The failure to pass a budget did not result in the shutdown of the entire government, but it did result in closure of agencies and programs that were not considered essential. Thus, the military was funded and Social Security checks were issued, but the national parks and other agencies were closed or partially closed. Even so, the shutdown impacted many people either directly by limiting available services or indirectly because pay was withheld and business confidence was undermined. As a result, various business groups "demanded the immediate reopening of the government" (Weisman, 2013, October 10, A12).

The shutdown lasted for 16 days and ended with "a near total defeat for

Republican conservatives," when the Congress agreed to a deal that would fund the government through January 15, 2014 and raise the debt ceiling to a level that would allow borrowing until February 2014 (Weisman & Parker, October 17, 2013, A1). The deal was reached after the Treasury Department warned "that it could run out of money to pay national obligations within a day" (Weisman & Parker, 2013, October 17, A1). The combination of public outrage and the threat of "an inevitable market crash" led Republicans to accept an agreement in which all they achieved was a "slight tightening of income verification rules" relating to the Affordable Care Act ("Republican Surrender," October 17, 2013, A28; Weisman & Parker, 2013, October 17, A19).

President Obama, rather than celebrating his victory, continued to state his position that "he was willing to have a wide-ranging budget negotiation once the government was reopened and the debt limit was raised" (Weisman & Parker, 2013, October 17, 19). The hope of both the President and Republican leaders was that the public debacle of the government shutdown and near debt default had changed the situation and "the fever was broken" in the faction that opposed any compromise and that consequently broader negotiations on resolving the fiscal crisis might be possible (Weisman & Parker, 2013, October 17, A19).

These broader negotiations were supposed to begin with an effort led by Republican Representative Paul Ryan and Democratic Senator Patty Murray to find agreement on "modest confidence-building measures to replace the sequestration cuts in 2014" (Weisman & Calmes, 2013, October 18, A18). It quickly became clear, however, that the shutdown had not broken the fever. In fact, conservative activists "Far from being chastened" responded by "ratcheting up their efforts to rid the party of the sort of timorous Republicans who, they said, doomed their effort to defunding the health law from the start" (Martin, Rutenberg, & Peters, 2013, October 20, A20). When the argument that a debt default threatened the economy is viewed as a sign of moral weakness, it is clear that rational discussion or negotiation is not possible.

The crisis was only partially resolved with the end of the shutdown, since the debt ceiling would need to be raised by late February 2014. As in October that crisis was not decided until days before authority to issue additional debt would have expired, triggering "a potentially catastrophic default" (Parker & Weisman, 2014, February 13, A3).

5. *Conclusion*

The government shutdown and the debt ceiling brinksmanship "flirted with a market crisis" (Hulse, 2014, February 13), A3). The cost was considerable. One study estimated that the cumulative effect of "fiscal uncertainty" was to reduce economic growth by .3 percent, cutting income by $150 billion and reducing employment by 900,000 jobs (Lowrey, Popper, & Schwartz, 2013, October 17, A19).

Ultimately the fiscal crises of fall 2013 and winter 2014 were resolved when, the Congress passed a "clean" extension of the debt limit, an extension that simply expanded the ability of the nation to purchase additional debt without any other policy action. This result, however, did not occur because the liberal public sphere worked as Madison designed it to work. In fact, there was almost no real argumentative clash between advocates of extending the debt ceiling and their primary opponents in the Tea Party wing of the Republican Party. President Obama made a case for extending the debt ceiling and continued to advocate for a so-called "grand bargain" to produce a long-term solution to the deficit problem. He also clearly explained why threatening to cause a catastrophic result unless a given action was taken undercut democracy itself and inevitably would result in disastrous policy outcomes. There certainly are grounds to critique his argumentation, but he clearly fulfilled his role in the liberal public sphere.

In contrast, Senator Cruz and others focused their attention on defunding Obamacare. It is notable that their strongest arguments for the shutdown and for brinksmanship about the debt ceiling were not focused on budget policy itself, but on the necessity of protecting the nation from the "nightmare" of Obamacare. They also absolutely refused to consider any proposal that would address long-term fiscal problems both with spending cuts and tax increases. In that way, their views were totally constrained either by ideological vision or by the demands of a political faction. In either case, the debate that was produced was clearly "inauthentic."

Moreover, their fixation on repealing the health care law was not based in actual experience with the law. Although the Obama administration initially had predicted that 7 million people would enroll in coverage, even with the bad rollout, 8.1 million people actually enrolled and almost another eight million received coverage through Medicaid expansion or because children under 26 were allowed to stay on their parent's coverage ("Vanishing Cry," 2014, June 2,

A16). Nor were the predictions of vast increases in health care spending supported by the data (Kogan & Chen, 2014, 3). Thus the future of the American and world economy was put at risk because of a law unrelated to the Congressional budget process and the law in question was a policy success, although a PR failure.

The expert consensus that the debt ceiling had to be raised was widely reported in the mainstream media, although this had little impact on public opinion. While the media focused on the political give and take, they did report on the dangers posed by failure to resolve the crisis. Thus, the media and expert communities did their jobs in the liberal public sphere. The same cannot be said of the public.

Going into the final week before the shutdown only a quarter of Americans were following the budget talks closely (Pew, 2013, September 23). The lack of attention may partially explain their inconsistent views. In relation to the risks of default, the public was deeply skeptical of the consensus that the debt ceiling needed to be extended, with 39 percent believing that "the country can go past the deadline for raising the debt limit without major economic problems" (Pew, 2103, October 7). Among Republicans, 52 percent overall and 56 percent of conservatives believed that failing to raise the debt ceiling would not produce major problems (Pew, 2013, October 15).

Public opinion was split on who was responsible and who should give ground. Prior to the beginning of the shutdown, Pew found that 39 percent would blame Republicans in Congress, while 36 percent would blame Obama (2013, September 23). On the issue of compromise, Pew found that 57 percent of the public "want lawmakers they agree with on this issue to be more willing to compromise, even if it means passing a budget they disagree with" (2013, September 23). Of course, Obama repeatedly had offered a grand bargain on fiscal issues. Moreover, polling previous to the crisis made it quite clear that the public favored a balanced approach to deficit reduction, including both program cuts and increased tax revenues (see Rowland, 2013, 6). The apparently conflicting attitudes cannot be explained based on public views of the Affordable Care Act. A New York Times/CBS poll found that 56% of Americans favored upholding and improving the law, while 38 percent favored repeal (Martin & Kpicki, 2013, September 26, A21; also see Pew, 2013, September 13).

It would seem that the public strongly wanted a compromise on the budget,

favored a balanced approach to deficit reduction, and wanted to preserve and improve the Affordable Care Act, but also blamed both sides almost equally, despite the fact that President Obama actually supported the positions they favored, while Republicans opposed them.

If the liberal public sphere had worked properly, there either would have been no crisis or it would have been quickly resolved when the one-sided nature of the debate became clear. Instead, the crisis was resolved only when the Republican leaders in Congress "collectively decided that they needed to quickly dispose of the debt ceiling fight in order to maintain the political focus on President Obama, his health care law and a souring political atmosphere for the president's party" (Parker & Weisman, 2014, February 13, A3). Even after that calculation was made, only 12 Republicans in the Senate and 28 in the House voted for the final legislation (Parker & Weisman, 2014, February 13, A3; Hulse, 2014, February 13, A3). It would seem that the shutdown and debt ceiling crises were resolved despite, not because of, the balance of argument in the dispute.

At the same time, Madison recognized that democracy is an inherently messy system of government. It is for this reason that he argued in Federalist 51 that "ambition must be made to counteract ambition," concluding that: "In the extended republic of the United States, and among the great variety of interests, parties and sects which it embraces, a coalition of a majority of the whole society could seldom take place upon any other principles than those of justice and the general good" (1999, 295, 298). The various fiscal crises from 2011 through 2014 surely would have sorely tested Madison's faith expressed in Federalist 41 that "A bad cause seldom fails to betray itself" (1999, 230). Even some Republicans recognized that risking debt default was a very bad cause. Speaker of the House John Boehner "privately told Republican lawmakers" in early October "that he would not allow a potentially more crippling federal default" (Parker & Lowrey, 2013, October 4, A1). Yet, the crises were not resolved until after a significant shutdown of the government and only when the nation went to the brink of default. For a significant period, it appeared that the "bad cause" might win out. Ultimately, however, Madison was right and the crisis was averted, not with a truly reasonable plan for action on the deficit, but at least with legislation that avoided an economic catastrophe.

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ISSA Proceedings 2014 – Argumentation In Ronald Reagan's Presidential Campaign Commercials

Abstract: This article reflects on the role of argumentation in running a successful presidential campaign. It describes the notions of 'presence' and 'communion' by Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, uses them to identify and analyze arguments and argumentation strategies used in Ronald Reagan's campaign commercials and suggests conclusions which can be drawn on the basis of the

analysis.

1. *Political argumentation and presidential campaign rhetoric*
Political argumentation is about how politicians argue their cases to either win others' acceptance or persuade them to change their thinking, behavior or decision. It helps to specify political goals and identify the means available to achieve these goals. Seen as an essential part of political communication, argumentation creates a political reality and allows structuring, controlling, and manipulating its interpretation. It defines situations, communicates information, and evaluates events. In politics, arguments link politicians with the public. They serve to express their political positions, convey their identifications, and reveal their commitments. As elements of political discourse, arguments function as stimuli for action. Appropriate arguments result in the acceptance of proposed policies, support for specific issues, and obedience to laws while inadequate arguments bring about rejection, objection and disregard. Political argumentation most often includes persuasion – a tool used to influence others and shape their ways of thinking and behavior. Political public speaking seems to be designed to persuade more than inform or argue. It appears to be constructed to mask rather than reveal true meanings, to appeal to emotions rather than reason, to mute and eliminate potential problems rather than raise difficult questions or give rise to substantive and essential discussions. In the United States, this is especially evident when one listens to presidential campaign rhetoric. American electoral discourse demonstrates that political argumentation serves to convince more than enlighten. Based on carefully planned and presented arguments, be it those which appeal to reason or emotions, it primarily means to influence public cognitions and impressions. While it does not coerce voters to make specific choices, it does involve a deliberate attempt to influence their decisions and actions.

In *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca define argumentation as "the discursive techniques allowing us to induce or to increase the mind's adherence to the theses presented for its assent" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 4). Perelman believes that a rhetor can gain the adherence of the audience he speaks to if he first creates a presence and then establishes communion with it. He creates a presence when he identifies the audience's opinions and beliefs and strengthens the aspects of the

audience's views and convictions which further his cause. He establishes communion with the audience when he recognizes and appeals to its shared values and thus predisposes the audience to a desired action. After all, as Perelman states in an article *"The New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning*," the rhetor's ultimate goal is to get the audience participate in the action (Perelman, 1970, p. 82). The means to reach the goal is the language. According to Perelman, both presence and communion are closely connected to the rhetor's choice of rhetorical devices which vary according to factors such as the audience that he addresses, the context within which the language is used, the constraints that determine its effectiveness and the exigencies that define its form and content. To create a presence the rhetor uses both linguistic devices, which bring desired elements into the audience's consciousness, and argumentative schemes, which persuade the audience to accept the premises the rhetor puts forward and provoke it to act. Perelman lists a number of linguistic tools which stylistically amplify certain elements and two techniques of argumentation: associative, which links separate phenomena together so that the audience can see a unity among them, and dissociative, which separates concepts originally interconnected in order to restructure the audience's idea about them.

Furthermore, within the associative scheme, he classifies arguments into quasi-logical and real where the former are based in formal reasoning and the latter appeal to reality and establish the real. As for ways which the rhetor uses to enter into communion with the audience, Perelman mentions appeals to values, abstract or concrete, which dispose the audience to a certain course of action, and rhetorical techniques, literary devices, figures, and oratorical communication which turns the audience's disposition into action.

2. *Setting*

To gain a fuller understanding of the discursive techniques used by Ronald Reagan in the 1984 presidential elections, the specific circumstances which shaped the form and content of his campaign discourse should be outlined briefly. In 1981 Reagan entered the White House with a conviction that peace was achievable only through strength and that confrontation was the most effective means of controlling Soviet behavior. At the heart of his foreign affairs was the containment of Soviet expansionist inclinations which he though could be curbed only through a renewed arms race. Nuclear superiority was the means to achieve an effective Communist rollback. Another important aspect of Reagan's foreign

policy was an ideological offensive launched against the Soviets. It demonstrated that the United States was the leader of the free world, that American know-how provided solutions to the problems of the underdeveloped nations and that American approach to politics ensured progress and defended democracy. Finally, restoration of American prosperity through low inflation and high growth rates was seen as the means to strengthen America's ability to confront Soviet power.

Reagan put these foreign policy concepts into action through a massive military spending on new weapons systems, research and development, and improvements in combat readiness and troop mobility, through support and aid to groups fighting against Communism in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East, and through an anti-Communist rhetorical crusade. He used his public statement to portray the Soviet Union as evil, labeling it as a "power untamed," a "totalitarian force" (Reagan, 1982), and an "evil empire" (Reagan, March 8, 1983). He presented a negative image of the Soviet system and its means of power, calling Communism a "regime," and a "[tyranny]" and its instruments "subversion," "conflict," "assault," and "violence" (Reagan, 1982). Finally, he described members of the Soviet leadership as people who "reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat" and called their exercise of authority "oppression," "repression," "destruction" (Reagan, 1982), and "aggression" (Reagan, March 23, 1983).

Relying on strident rhetoric and clear-cut policies, Reagan, on the one hand, restored American sense of strength and leadership, but, on the other, evoked the fear of war. While his rhetoric led many Americans to believe that he managed to defend and protect the nation's interest effectively, it, at the same time, made them feel threatened by the possibility of confrontation with the Soviet Union. Opinion polls carried out at the end of Reagan's first term seemed to indicate that most Americans wished to reorient American-Soviet relations, moving from confrontation to cooperation, from competition to coexistence, from intensification to relaxation of tensions. Reagan's task was to capture the new attitude and articulate it. To win the reelection campaign, he had to reflect voters' attitude and persuade them that he understood their fears and that he identified with their concerns and that it was in their interest to identify with him. Realizing that effective expression of voters' attitude and establishment of a trustful relationship with them were crucial to his reelection, he focussed on identifying the opinions and strengthening the views which he shared with the public and on

recognizing and addressing the values which he thought would help him encourage the public to take the desired action. He used rhetoric which conveyed his moral and political judgments and attitudes, with emotional appeals so constructed as to reveal both the values he believed in, the actions he favored and the depth of his commitment to the actions and with logical arguments designed to accomplish his proof of rationality and convince voters to place their trust and confidence in his performance. While the forms with which Reagan chose to convey his emotional appeals and logical arguments were in part determined by his personal characteristics, they were also in part dictated by revised public attitudes to American-Soviet relations. Considering the new political context, Reagan had to ensure voters that in his handling of foreign affairs he would take decisions and actions which would help to reconcile the differences that divided the two powers instead of thriving on them, to soothe tensions rather than intensifying them, to solve problems instead of aggravating them.

3. *Analysis*

Reagan made at least three points of departure for his campaign argumentation. First, he argued that the Soviet Union was a threat. Second, he maintained that America was strong again. Third, he persuaded that peace was America's highest aspiration. He sought to gain adherence to his statements through quasi-logical arguments, through arguments based on the structure of reality, and through arguments that establish the structure of reality. He argued by sacrifice when he declared that America "will negotiate for [peace], sacrifice for it." He used the association of succession when he recalled that "we stopped complaining together and started working together" to the effect that "Today, America is strong again." He relied on the association of coexistence when he stated that "With your help, we've renewed our strength and working together, we've prepared America for peace," stressing the link between the people and their actions. Finally, he argued by analogy when he compared the Soviet Union to a bear, the United States to a hunter and the woods to the context of the Cold War.

In his argumentation, Reagan relied on both inductive and deductive reasoning. Used in the argumentation of the assumption that the Soviet Union was a threat, he did not mean to prove definitely that the war with the Soviets was real but intended to merely increase the probability that it was not imagined. Reagan drew on the public's inability to predict the future and posed an open question about the issue. While, on the one hand, he allowed the possibility of a military

conflict to evoke the fear of the threat and use of force, on the other, he stated that there was no evidence that the threat of confrontation was real.

He presented two sides of the issue, trying not to support one side over the other or to reconcile the two positions, to let voters decide which option they favored. Reagan involved the public into his consideration intentionally. He knew that the audience was more likely to accept his conclusion if they arrived at it together. And to that end he created the impression that he did not impose any opinion on it, that he respected its freedom, that he invited it to make its own choice and let it make the decision. By contrast, he relied on deductive reasoning to convince that America was strong again. He maintained that the United States was strong again because it was respected again. He argued that four years of hard work in the area of foreign relations, frequent diplomatic visits, difficult talks and negotiations with foreign governments, noticeably improved America's global position. He strengthened his deductive reasoning with a sequence of shots, contrasting groups of people protesting against US policies and burning the American flag with crowds of people and foreign government representatives of Japan, China, France, Italy and Britain welcoming and hosting official US delegations. Reagan used contrast to emphasize that there had been a change in the perceptions about and the attitude towards the United States among foreign nations and point out that his diplomacy caused that perception and attitude change.

Just as he wanted to construct his argumentation according to reason, Reagan liked also to appeal to emotions. He evoked the feeling of mission when he said that "we can work toward a lasting peace for our children, and their children to come," the feeling of hope when he envisioned that "America's best days, and democracy's best days, lie ahead" as well as the feelings of fear and terror when he recalled that "we've faced two world wars, a war in Korea, and then Vietnam" and when he speculated about another war with the Soviets. He reasoned that arguments evoking the feelings of patriotism and the fear of war were universal enough to attract the attention of the majority of voters. He meant positive feelings to make his listeners feel proud if they decided to support him, and negative feelings to make them feel ashamed and guilty if they chose to do otherwise. Reagan used very simple and general appeals over complex and specific ones to reach the widest audience possible.

The fact that he used only three objects of agreement seemed to have served the

same purpose. Reagan directed how public perceived and conceived his lines of argument through assumptions, truths, and promises. He assumed when he stated that "many countries thought America had seen its day. But we knew better" to enhance the value of the fact that America had regained its strategic advantage and to stress that it did so under his presidency. He expressed a self-evident opinion when he said that "while governments sometimes disagree, all their people want peace" to convey his realistic understanding of foreign policies and of the differences between people's desires and governments' difficulties in addressing them. He pledged not to "surrender for [peace] – now or ever" to justify his potential controversial and debatable moves and actions taken to ensure peace worldwide.

Regan amplified his argumentation with stylistic techniques of imagery and repetition. He persuaded the public that the Soviet Union was a threat in a series of shots presenting a grizzly bear – the Soviet threat – lumbering through the woods, standing face to face with a hunter – the United States – and retreating. He strengthened his message with an expression of doubt if the threat was real or imagined and with a rhetorical question asking viewers if it was not "smart to be as strong as the bear? If there [was] a bear?" Regan maintained presence with the audience by repeating the view that "it takes a strong America to build a peace that lasts," by reiterating the belief that "working together" helped to make America strong again and by restating the conviction that "America is prepared for peace." He increased adherence to his statements through images as well. He conveyed the notion of a strong America by comparing the United States to a South Russian Ovcharka, a large and robust sheepdog, and by showing shots of him and major world leaders meeting together. He communicated to the public that renewed America's power was the result of a collaborative effort using shots of a space shuttle launch and of a satellite in orbit. He convinced viewers that America was ready for peace with a shot of a smiling child on a porch with the US flag flying beside him. Reagan heightened the persuasive effect, arguing through soothing and calm narrative of advertising executive Hal Riney and his soft and avuncular voice and through suspenseful music and heartbeat sound effect.

He also strengthened his argumentation with techniques designed to establish communion with the audience. He adhered to at least two self-evident abstract values of peace and strength, which best reflected the motifs, needs and interests he wanted to address. He drew on the value of peace when he maintained that it

was "the highest aspiration of the American people" and when he declared that "A president's most important job is to secure peace – not just now, but for the lifetimes of our children" to convey that he shared the public's ambitions and to assure it that he had strong will and determination to fulfill them. Once Reagan centered the public's attention around the value of peace, he enhanced his sense of communion with the audience with the value of strength. Making the statement that "it takes a strong America to build a peace that lasts," he expressed his strong belief in the notion of peace through strength, implying that his policy of a military build-up was an indispensable component of peace. Aware that the concept of peace through strength failed to win full public approval in the first four years of his presidency, Reagan deliberately gave voters the chance to choose between peace and war to use their support for peace – the public's choice was fairly predictable – into their support for peace through strength. Aware that he was unlikely to win wider support for the cause of peace through strength rather than for peace alone, Reagan structured his message around three points: first in which he talked about the virtues of peace, second in which he mentioned the military means necessary to achieve it, and third in which he listed the benefits of peace achieved through strength thus increasing his chances for reaching the goal of his argumentation.

4. *Outcome*

Reagan surely achieved the aim of his polemic winning an unprecedented landslide victory. He carried 49 of the 50 states, becoming only the second presidential candidate to do so after Richard Nixon's victory in the 1972 presidential election, and won 525 out of 538 electoral votes, which is the highest total ever received by a presidential candidate. Running a campaign which was the inverse of the 1980 race, he called for relaxation of tensions and for peaceful solutions of problems. Reagan restrained from his former anti-Soviet rhetoric but he also stayed relatively vague about his foreign policy plans. The absence of a clear foreign policy vision may indicate that he did not mean to change his tough anti-Soviet approach. The change in attitude articulated in the campaign spots might have been merely a change in tactics only. Reagan might have used new campaign techniques to relax public vigilance and win their mandate for another term in which he would continue developing his hard line anti-Soviet policies. Vague foreign policy vision may also suggest that he did not really have a precise plan of action. He knew that his second term diplomacy had to be different than the first but he did not really have a plan in place. Realizing that voters' concerns

based on his inclinations shaped in the first administration about his rigid anti-Soviet posture which could increase the danger of war, expand armaments and develop nuclear arsenal could not be ignored, he chose to construct vague statements to create the impression that he had in fact addressed the subject matter.

It can also be suggested that the lack of clearly articulated foreign policy platform meant that Reagan indeed had a vision of what American-Soviet relations would look like in his second term but did not reveal it for fear of losing his strategic advantage. He did not want to be involved into a discussion about his give-and-take attitude and chose to run a campaign based on public trust in the results of his foreign policy making. One final suggestion is that the absence of a coherent policy and a unifying vision of American foreign affairs resulted from Reagan's unsuccessful four years on the international scene.

Aware that the controversies surrounding the massive military build-up of US weapons and troops, the escalation of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, the US intervention in Lebanon, the invasion of Grenada, and the deteriorating US relations with Libya hurt his rating in the polls, Reagan might have run a campaign strategy based on vague foreign policy plans to avoid a public discussion about his diplomatic failures. He knew that it was politically damaging to defend one's position, especially if one were the incumbent president, therefore he might have decided not to respond to the opposition's accusations in order not to undermine his chances for victory.

5. *Conclusion*

Reagan's achievements in foreign affairs in the next four years of his presidency indicate that he well calculated the risks of his campaign strategies and well suited his campaign discourse techniques to the circumstances. Avoiding assertive anti-Soviet rhetoric and a precise foreign policy plan Reagan made "space" for himself to adequately react to the new developments in American-Soviet relations initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev, the first Soviet leader who actively sought political and economic reform in the Soviet Union and who seriously wanted to discuss a possible peace with the United States and was ready to make concessions necessary to achieve the goal. The fact that in his campaign Reagan neither kept his anti-Soviet approach nor presented a specific foreign policy proposal allowed his administration to observe Soviet actions and react responsibly to them. Drawing on the image of a negotiator and peacemaker

that Reagan was trying to create through his campaign discourse, the president could shift from anti-Soviet policies, cutting armaments, reducing nuclear weapons and developing more cordial relations with the opponent, without being accused of yielding ground to or a point to the Soviets. Moreover, he was communicating to his detractors that he was not a reckless, unpredictable and unaccountable warmonger, but an idealist devoted to the American ideal of peace, as well as a pacifist who proved that conflicts could be solved in a nonviolent way. While during the campaign Reagan could not have predicted that the Soviets would reorient their policies during his presidency, it should be noted that taken completely by surprise he reacted to them quickly and appropriately, fostering prospects for global peace and for the end of the Cold War.

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