

ISSA Proceedings 1998 - “Scorching Irony, Not Convincing Argument, Is Needed”: Frederick Douglass On Some Rhetorical Limitations Of Argumentation



This is the fourth ISSA conference to which I have contributed a paper. Each paper, with the exception of the first, has discussed the ideas of some thinker who was, for one reason or another, largely opposed to the strong Western insistence upon argumentative justification. Thus in 1990 I rehearsed Friedrich Schlegel’s complex rationale for believing that “nothing should, and nothing can be proved,” while in 1994 I explored Plato’s attempt to “blame Lysias” for deviating from argumentative procedures which Plato advocated in theory but neglected to practice[i]. I have chosen to examine thinkers who are skeptical about, if not also opposed to, argumentation primarily because much of my own current work seeks to trace the long subalternated tradition of Western anti-argumentative, “declarative rhetoric.” I am interested, that is, in all of those thinkers who, for a wide range reasons, have come to believe that the process of providing reasons and inferences in support of claims, is not, or at least is not always, the best way to accomplish communicative, rhetorical or epistemological purposes. I must confess, however, that I especially enjoy discussing such argumentative agnostics and atheists at this particular conference, for this is a place which, more than any other I’ve encountered, abounds with the hubris of argumentation, and it gives me some small pleasure to play the role of the oracle of doom, to be the one who, however modestly, attempts to inject a smidgen of yin into a discourse that is otherwise so lopsidedly yang.

As part of my larger project of recuperating the long declarative protest to the hegemony of argumentative justification in the West, I am forever on the lookout for argumentative Nichtmitmacher, for those refractory types who refuse to accede to the conventional requirement that one be prepared to justify all of one’s

assertions, or “declarations,” through recourse to argumentative justifications. I have by now collected quite a few odd characters in my declarative menagerie. Many of them, of course, oppose argumentation for rather poor reasons. But several of them, like Meister Eckhardt, Friedrich Schlegel, Soren Kierkegaard, Henry Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Walter Benjamin, provide objections to argumentation that deserve to be taken very seriously.

The author I wish to discuss today, that 19th century escaped American slave, polymathic autodidact, turned abolitionist orator par excellence, Frederick Douglass, is yet another who has some objections to argumentation which, I believe, are well worth the consideration of all who, like me, are interested in the many ways argumentation has been challenged by the subalternated declarative tradition.

Douglass’s thoughts regarding the rhetorical limitations of argumentation occur toward the middle of what is generally, and I think rightfully, considered to be his oratorical masterpiece, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July? An Address Delivered in Rochester, New York, on 5 July 1852.” I frequently have my students analyze this speech as part of my course on “Rhetoric and American Culture.” There are, of course, many features of the work that lend themselves especially well to rhetorical examination. Douglass is a master stylist, so it is easy for students to discover and scrutinize all manner of rhetorical devices, with which the work, like most 19th century American orations, is replete. The speech also exemplifies the characteristically American form of the jeremiad, a form inherited from early Puritan oratory much discussed in recent years. **[ii]**

Thus the work is divided chronologically into three basic sections. The first eulogizes the accomplishments of the American founders. Conveniently eliding the many shortcomings of these men, of which he was well apprised, Douglass paints them, borrowing their own sacralized words, as men of principles.

They loved their country better than their own private interests, and, though this is not the highest form of human excellence, all will concede that it is a rare virtue, and that when exhibited, it ought to command respect. He who will, intelligently, lay down his life for his country, is a man whom it is not in your nature to despise. Your fathers staked their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor on the cause of their country. In their admiration of liberty they lost sight of all other interests.

They were peace men; but they preferred revolution to peaceful submission to

bondage. They were quiet men; but they did not shrink from agitating against oppression. They showed forbearance; but they knew its limits. They believed in order; but not in the order of tyranny. With them, nothing was “settled” that was not right. With them justice, liberty and humanity were “final”; not slavery and oppression. You may well cherish the memory of such men. They were great in their day and generation.**[iii]**

We then receive a sentence which begins the transition to the speech’s second section, concerning the repudiation of the founder’s principles, and describing the moral degradation of the present situation. Their solid manhood stands out the more as we contrast it with these degenerate times.**[iv]**

In moving to consideration of the degenerate but potentially regenerative present, “the accepted time with God and his cause,” “the ever-living now,” Douglass reminds his audience that many Americans are not included in the joyous celebration of freedom that the Fourth of July symbolizes for free white Americans.**[v]** This leads him into a clear topic sentence, thesis, and amplification. Fellow-citizens; above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, to-day, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them. If I do forget, if I do not faithfully remember those bleeding children of sorrow this day, “may my right hand forget her cunning, and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!” To forget them, to pass lightly over their wrongs, and to chime in with the popular theme, would be reason most scandalous and shocking, and would make me a reproach before God and the world. My subject, then fellow-citizens, is American Slavery. I shall see, this day, and its popular characteristics, from the slave’s point of view. Standing, there, identified with the American bondman, making his wrongs mine, I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker to me than on this 4th of July! Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting. America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future. Standing with God and the crushed and bleeding slave on this occasion, I will, in the name of humanity which is outraged, in the name of liberty which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the Bible, which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call into question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery – the great sin and shame of America! “I will not equivocate; I will not excuse.” I

will use the severest language I can command; and yet not one word shall escape me that any man, whose judgement is not blinded by prejudice, or who is not at heart a slaveholder, shall not confess to be right and just. **[vi]**

Now clearly this is great stuff. It retains much of its rhetorical power even when read by a thin-voiced professor a hundred and thirty some years after the issue of abolition was decided. One can only imagine the force it must have had upon its original abolition-sympathetic audience when declaimed by arguably the finest orator of a country and age which prided itself on the quality of its oratory. To use the more impoverished language of our own day we might note that Mr. Douglass is clearly on a rhetorical roll here. We might thus expect him to continue to build the amplificatio, to depict for us in greater detail, and with greater vividity, some of the legion crimes and hypocrisies of the institution of slavery. He will indeed do that quite soon. But for the moment, he interrupts his excoriation to provide us with an interesting little digression or excursus.

Immediately after the first forceful assertion of his central thesis, he suddenly chooses to spend two pages of speech text elaborating a critique of argumentation to which we will turn our attention here. He begins the excursus with a traditional anticipatio. But I fancy I hear some one of my audience say it is just in this circumstance that you and your brother abolitionists fail to make a favorable impression on the public mind. Would you argue more, and denounce less, would you persuade more, and rebuke less, your cause would be much more likely to succeed. **[vii]**

This anticipatio is followed, as one would expect, with an immediate refutatio, taking, as so often in 19th century American oratory, the form of several rapid rhetorical questions, all intended to establish that the main facts germane to the slavery issue are already conceded even by those who oppose abolition. **[viii]**

But I submit that where all is plain there is nothing to be argued. What point in the anti-slavery creed would you have me argue? On what branch of the subject do the people of this country need light? Must I undertake to prove that the slave is a man? That point is conceded already. Nobody doubts it. The slaveholders themselves acknowledge it in the enactment of laws for their government. They acknowledge it when they punish disobedience on the part of the slave. There are seventy-two crimes in the State of Virginia, which if committed by a black man, (no matter how ignorant he be), subject him to the punishment of death; while only two of the same crimes will subject a white man to the like punishment. What is this but an acknowledgement that slave is a moral, intellectual and responsible

being? The manhood of the slave is conceded. It is admitted in the fact that the Southern statute books are covered with enactments forbidding, under severe fines and penalties, the teaching of the slave to read and write. When you can point to any such laws, in reference to the beasts of the field, then I may consent to argue the manhood of the slave. When the dogs in your streets, when the fowls of the air, when cattle on your hills, when the fish of the sea, and the reptiles that crawl, shall be unable to distinguish the slave from a brute, then will I argue with you that the slave is a man!**[ix]**

The first line here is quite significant. It suggests that Douglass views argumentation as a process oriented toward resolving misunderstandings of facts or opinions. If everything is clear, or “plain,” to all participants at the outset, then, there can be no argumentation, since argumentation seeks only to adjudicate differences. Douglass thus seems to be asserting the counter-intuitive thesis that the basic facts of slavery are clear to both those who seek to abolish it and those who wish to uphold it. Now since the other side would undoubtedly wish to deny this, Douglass attempts to establish that, although they may explicitly deny abolitionist principles in theory, supporters of slavery still tacitly endorse these same “facts” through their practice. Thus in punishing slaves severely for transgressions, they too recognize the basic fact that slaves are “moral, intellectual and responsible being(s)” etc.. Douglass is thus here involved in making what we today call a “transcendental argument.”

He begins with some universally acknowledged reality, i.e. the punishment of slaves, and then seeks to establish that such a reality is only rendered “possible” through some prior condition, i.e. a tacit recognition of the slave’s humanity. The transcendental argument merely renders explicit what was already implicit, but unrecognized, in the situation at hand.

Now this is hardly the place to rehearse the long, interesting, and rather checkered, history of transcendental arguments in Western discourse.**[x]** Those of you familiar with Kant’s philosophy will be acquainted with such procedures, as will those of you who have encountered the specious machinations of Kant’s epigoni among the contemporary German and American advocates of “universal pragmatics” and “transcendental discourse ethics,” those Latter-day prestidigitators who are forever claiming that, “merely by participating in argument at all” you are already tacitly acceding to whatever goofy theory of argumentative discourse they have cooked up this week, that “your every denial”

merely further establishes the veracity of anything they happen to claim. In fairness to Douglass, however, the transcendental argument he advances would seem far more credible. The punishments specified do seem to presuppose some moral agency of the slaves.

Having thus indirectly argued against the first counter-claim, that slaves are not moral agents, Douglass reiterates his refusal to engage in traditional argumentative operations, opting instead to valorize, as do so many other declarative rhetoricians, the act of "affirmation" over that of demonstration or proof.

For the present, it is enough to affirm the equal manhood of the negro race. Is it not astonishing that, while we are ploughing, planting and reaping, using all kinds of mechanical tools, erecting houses, constructing bridges, building ships, working in metals of brass, iron, copper, silver and gold; that, while we are reading, writing and cyphering, acting as clerks, merchants and secretaries, having among us lawyers, doctors, ministers, poets, authors, editors, orators and teachers; that, while we are engaged in all manner of enterprises common to other men, digging gold in California, capturing the whale in the Pacific, feeding sheep and cattle on the hill-side, living, moving, acting, thinking, planning, living in families as husbands, wives and children, and, above all, confessing and worshipping the Christian's God, and are looking hopefully for life and immortality beyond the grave, we are called upon to prove that we are men! **[xi]**

Here too the primary strategy is to reveal the absurdity of the counter-claim, i.e. that slaves are not human, by enumerating - to an extent tolerable only to a 19th century audience - many of the ways in which the actual quotidian activities of African-Americans belie that assumption. We then get further *anticipatio* and *refutatio*, in the form of additional rhetorical questions interspersed with emphatic repudiations, this time with a specific attack upon the rhetorical appropriateness of argumentation in the current setting.

Would you have me argue that man is entitled to liberty? that he is the rightful owner of his body? You have already declared it. Must I argue the wrongfulness of slavery? Is that a question for Republicans? Is it to be settled by the rules of logic and argumentation, as a matter beset with great difficulty, involving a doubtful application of justice, hard to be understood? How should I look to-day, in the presence of Americans, dividing and subdividing a discourse, to show that men have a natural right to freedom? speaking of it relatively, and positively, negatively, and affirmatively. To do so, would be to make myself ridiculous, and to

offer an insult to your understanding. There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven, that does not know that slavery is wrong for him. **[xii]**

Here we learn more about how Douglass conceives of argumentation. Since his conception differs markedly from the ones utilized today, we should pause to note, that argumentation, for Douglass, is something that one properly uses, along with “the rules of logic,” in situations “beset with great difficulty,” situations where it is imperative to understand the particular case through the “application” of general principles. This is, of course, a conception of argumentation which derives from scholastic thought, and which has made its way, via Puritanism and other protestant theology, into the political discourse of Douglass’s age. There is a time and place, it thus seems, when it is perfectly appropriate for an orator to “subdivide a discourse” for analytical purposes, when it is appropriate to consider the issue from various “relative,” “negative,” “positive,” and “affirmative” perspectives as was then frequently done in theological, philosophical, or some scientific discourses. In such cases, one seeks to get clear about the first principles, the basic premisses, indeed the foundational “facts” or “truths,” upon which the discourse might build. But the current situation is clearly not such a one. For, in this situation, everyone already knows the essential facts of the matter, it is merely a question of getting all to draw the proper implications from these truths for their behavior, to get them to see that these facts require them to render their currently complacent, slavery-complicitous actions consistent with their primary moral principles. In short, to use the jargon of our own day, this is a practical discourse situation, not a theoretical discourse situation.

Douglass continues by again utilizing rhetorical questions and emphatic enumeratio to establish the superfluity of providing an argumentative justification of his position.

What, am I to argue that it is wrong to make men brutes, to rob them of their liberty, to work them without wages, to keep them ignorant of their relations to their fellow men, to beat them with sticks, to flay their flesh with the lash, to load their limbs with irons, to hunt them with dogs, to sell them at auction, to sunder their families, to knock out their teeth, to burn their flesh, to starve them into obedience and submission to their masters? Must I argue that a system thus marked with blood, and stained with pollution, is wrong? No! I will not. I have better employments for my time and strength, than such arguments would

imply. **[xiii]**

Now partly what is going on here is the old rhetorical strategy of dismissing one's opposition as "too absurd to merit serious argumentation." Rather than explicitly anticipate and refute possible counter-arguments to the abolitionist position he advocates, Douglass simply refuses to consider that any such opposition, at least rational opposition, is even possible. And, of course, considering the way in which he has just depicted the issues, providing graphic presence to slavery's most egregious failings, the impossibility of opposing his position seems, especially to a largely sympathetic audience like the one in Rochester that day, quite credible enough. He is well aware, of course, that there are any number of reasons used by advocates of the institution of slavery side which must in fact be refuted by abolitionists to win over the vacillating masses of white Northerners. Indeed, much of the later part of the oration is directly concerned with providing refutations of anticipated counter-arguments, like, for example, the standard Southern argument that slavery is sanctioned in the U.S. constitution. But, for the moment, he wishes to paint all opposition as being too preposterous to warrant serious response.

In reading Douglass' dismissal of his opposition under cover of the somewhat dubious assertion that "even they agree" with his assessment of the basic facts of slavery, I am reminded not only of today's post-Kantian ratiocinators, but also of the long-running, largely disingenuous, exceedingly expensive, socially injurious, patently discriminatory and thoroughly ineffective American "war on drugs." For several years now, opponents of drug prohibition have attempted to provide rational arguments in favor of ending a reign of government repression directed selectively against people of color and the poor. And yet, so self-righteously moralistic is the "decadent Puritanism" of American public opinion that proponents of continued prohibition need seldom to respond to these arguments with counter-arguments. Instead they can continue to dismiss all arguments for decriminalization as being "too absurd," "too ridiculous," or especially "too dangerous," to warrant any serious response. For the reigning "drug-czar," Barry McCaffrey, too, it seems, arguing about the wisdom of the current American prohibition of drugs would be tantamount to wasting one's "time and strength." It is enough to reiterate the old, increasingly hypocritical mantras about "saving our kids" to dismiss all rational deliberation. Dismissal in lieu of argumentation, then, cuts both ways. Rhetorically considered, it can work, as it does here, well for an orator, especially when one is addressing an audience generally favorable to one's

own position. By ridiculing the opposition in various clever ways, one can give the impression of having “refuted” it without ever having to take its alternative seriously or to construct cogent counter-arguments. Certainly in the case of slavery it does seem doubtful that the other side has much of a case to consider. But, from the perspective of a normative theory of argument, such a procedure is always suspect, for there is simply no way to ensure, without recourse to argumentative deliberation, that the position dogmatically discounted as “too preposterous” to consider, might not also turn out to be true, or at least partially true.

Douglass continues by providing us with yet another refusal to engage in conventional argumentation with the opponents of abolition.

What then remains to be argued? Is it that slavery is not divine; that God did not establish it; that our doctors of divinity are mistaken? There is blasphemy in the thought. That which is inhuman, cannot be divine! Who can reason on such a proposition? They that can, may; I cannot. The time for such argument is past.**[xiv]**

Somewhat ironically, this passage, like several others railing against having to “argue” the divinity of slavery or lack thereof, actually makes a succinct, indeed even syllogistic, argument against the claim that slavery is divinely ordained: i.e slavery is inhuman, all inhuman things are not divine, therefore slavery is not divine. It then adds the idea that “the time for such argument is past,” which suggests that the other side had a burden of proof which they did not meet, although ample time was provided for them to do so.

We then finally encounter what seems to be the primary point of this rather long, and ostensibly peculiarly placed, digression on the inappropriateness of argumentation regarding the issue of slavery. At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument is needed. Oh had I the ability, and could I reach the nation’s ear, I would to-day, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire, it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced.**[xv]**

The main point here is that certain rhetorical situations require the rhetor to eschew the dispassionate or, as the period generally preferred to call it,

“disinterested,” attitude essential to argumentative deliberation, and to adopt instead a partisan or polemical stance which allows for the stimulation of the audience’s emotions or “passions” regarding the matter at hand. Dialectical argumentation then is too heavily dependent upon logos to be of great use to the orator who wishes to incite the masses to prompt action. Such an orator must also utilize ethos and especially pathos to persuade most effectively. It is interesting, however, that Douglass does not contrast “convincing argument” with “impassioned persuasion” or something similar, but rather with “scorching irony.” Why might he have chosen to specify his rhetorical alternative in this way? What exactly does he have in mind when advocating “scorching irony”? Well, among other things, it suggests that he is operating here with some conception of what Theodor Adorno calls “immanent critique.” It is not sufficient to build the positive case for abolition, even allowing for certain rhetorical embellishments. One must also reveal the “ironic” contradictions of the counter-case for slavery. It is thus quite understandable that Douglass should rhetorically wish for precisely what he, perhaps more than any person then living, so manifestly has; viz. the oratorical power to “pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm and stern rebuke.” [xvi] We might look more closely at these four terms from the rhetorical lexicon, “ridicule,” “reproach,” “sarcasm” and “rebuke.” Each of them implies some type of response which reveals the duplicity latent in the opponent’s assertions.

Irony is also a central term for another declarative rhetorician, that greatest theoretician of literary and dialectical irony, Friedrich Schlegel. For Schlegel, however, irony tends to be related to polysemy. Irony also reveals the dialectical nature of all truth, the impossibility of stating any thesis without to some extent also implying its negation. Thus many of Schlegel’s ironical statements seeks to exhibit the negation latent within the assertion. To provide an ironic interpretation of a text is thus, as many Schlegel scholars have pointed out, similar to providing its Derridian “deconstruction.” Such a conception of deconstructive irony seems appropriate here as well. In much the same way as a deconstructionist critic reveals the failure of the text itself to expunge what its author most emphatically seeks to eliminate, Douglass is masterful at revealing the extent to which the actual practice of slavery gives the lie to the virtuous and patriotic ideation in which it is justified.

His – by today’s conceptions actually quite argumentative – final justification of his refusal to engage in argumentation concluded, Douglass launches into a

reiteration and intensification of his attack on American complacency and hypocrisy, one so emphatic and delicious that I can't resist the temptation to read it too, even though doing so contributes only indirectly to the point about Douglass' awareness of the rhetorical limitations of disinterested argumentation which primarily concerns us here.

What to the American slave is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, and unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy - a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour.

Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the old world, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival. **[xvii]**

I am, of course, tempted to continue on and read you still more of this marvelously telling denunciation of my own still thoroughly hypermoralistic and hypocritical homeland. But it is no doubt better to return and finish the more parochial analysis of Douglass' dissatisfactions with argumentation. In this passage too, Douglass's primary strategy is to present a graphic, immanent critique of American society. As usual, this strategy affirms the basic American values, (justice, liberty, equality, greatness, religiosity etc.) and then employs polemic and "irony" to reveal the glaring inconsistency of current practice to these values. Like most American authors, according to Sacvan Bercovitch and other proponents of what is sometimes called "the new complicity historiography," Douglass nowhere ventures a thorough-going "transcendental critique" of the hegemonic American values or traditions themselves.

He does not attack the audience's independence day values or reveal the extent, say, to which the glorified "founders" were also hypocritical or racist. Instead he spends the first third of the speech eulogizing the "great" and "manly" white

leaders of the past. He purposely steers clear of a more radical, transcendental critique of American lore, of the type, say, which delighted his abolitionist fellow-traveller, Henry Thoreau. And for good reason. To adopt that strategy would require Douglass to abandon the resonant form of the American jeremiad, greatly weakening the rhetorical force of his inspirational appeal for moral rededication. A transcendental critique is also unnecessary here, since the immanent critique, with its magnificent “scorching irony,” quite adequately allows him to win the audience to his cause without threatening to alienate them with gratuitous and adscititious criticisms of their most cherished assumptions, criticisms of the type his more refractory friend, and one time last-minute oratorical stand-in, Mr. Thoreau, was wont to deploy with relish. **[xviii]**

The strategy of immanent critique also allows Douglass to move past the perilous present moment of eschatological decision to the third and final moment of the jeremiad, the promise of a future redeemed, a millennium of justice and joy as the fit reward for national moral regeneration.

Allow me to say, in conclusion, notwithstanding the dark picture I have this day presented of the state of the nation, I do not despair of this country. There are forces in operation, which must inevitably work the downfall of slavery. “The arm of the Lord is not shortened,” and the doom of slavery is certain. I, therefore, leave of where I began, with hope. **[xix]**

In the end, then, we shall overcome slavery. But we shall overcome it only through the “fire” of irony, ridicule, reproach, sarcasm and rebuke, not through the “light” of argumentation.

NOTES

i. William D. Fusfield, “Blaming Lysias: On the Origins of Western Argumentative Justification in the Socratic Proscription/Utilization of Stylistic, Reiterative, Equivocative and Combinational Rhetorical Forms,” Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Argumentation, edited by Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst, ISSA Publishers, (Dordrecht: 1995, SicSat) I, 311-27. William D. Fusfield, “‘Nothing Should and Nothing Can Be Proved’: Young Friedrich Schlegel’s Declarative Challenge to the Demonstrative Voice of Western Rhetoric,” in Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Argumentation, edited by Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst, ISSA Publishers, Dordrecht, 45-53, 1991.

ii. See especially Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, (Boston: 1953) and Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, (Madison: 1978,

U. of Wisconsin).

iii. Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?: An Address Delivered in Rochester, New York, on 5 July 1852," in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, edited by John W. Blassingame, (New Haven: 1969, Yale University) II, 364-5.

iv. Douglass, 365.

v. Douglass, 366.

vi. Douglass, 368-9.

vii. Douglass, 369

viii. For more on the problems with transcendental arguments, see the numerous essays of Charles Taylor, Herbert Keuth and Hans Albert.

ix. Douglass, 369-70.

x. For more on the problems with transcendental arguments, see the numerous essays of Charles Taylor, Herbert Keuth and Hans Albert.

xi. Douglass, 370.

xii. Douglass, 370.

xiii. Douglass, 370.

xiv. Douglass, 370-1.

xv. Douglass, 371.

xvi. Henry Thoreau is, as far as I can determine, the only other American orator of the age who can touch, and in some ways even surpass, Douglass in the intensity of his irony.

xvii. Douglass, 371.

xviii. To get a better handle on the rhetorical differences between immanent and transcendental critiques, it is quite useful to compare the Douglass speech here examined with one of Henry Thoreau's many famous attacks on the entire American ideography. Even a quick comparison with Thoreau's "Economy," "Slavery in Massachusetts," the John Brown essays or "Life Without Principle" will reveal many stark differences. Thoreau's tendency is always, as he noted himself, to emphatic "exaggeration" of the critique at hand. Such thorough-going "ruthless criticism," his policy of "leav(ing) out all the flattery and retain(ing) all the criticism," makes for very stimulating and provocative reading. And it certainly delights those few of his compatriots already sympathetic with his penetrating analysis of the many deep defects of American institutions. But it seems hardly to have ingratiated him with most of the chauvenistic New England audiences he addressed in his, hardly very successful, career as a lyceum lecturer. As he himself put it, "if you would get money as a writer or lecturer, you

must be popular, which is to go down perpendicularly.”
xix. Douglass, 386-7.