Higher-Order Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentation

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Abstract In a critical discussion, interlocutors can strategically maneuver by shading their expressed degree of standpoint commitment for rhetorical effect. When is such strategic shading reasonable, and when does it cross the line and risk fallacious derailment of the discussion? Analysis of President George W. Bush's 2002–2003 prewar commentary on Iraq provides an occasion to explore this question and revisit Douglas Ehninger's distinction between argumentation as "coercive correction" and argumentation as a "person-risking enterprise." Points of overlap between Ehninger's account and pragma-dialectical argumentation theory suggest avenues for harmonization of rhetorical and dialectical perspectives on argumentation. Out of this conceptual convergence comes theoretical resources for understanding strategic maneuvering, by accounting for ways that discussants exploit gaps between their externalized and actual "discussion attitude." As such higher-order strategic maneuvering played a major role in the 2003 Iraq prewar "discourse failure," perspicacious understanding of this particular argumentative maneuver carries practical, as well as theoretical import.

**Keywords** Rhetoric · Dialectic · Strategic maneuvering · Iraq war · Douglas Ehninger · Argumentation · Pragma-dialectics

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Douglas Ehninger's theoretical gem, "Argument as Method" (1970), introduces us to two unsavory debate characters. First, there is the "neutralist"—a disputant who eschews commitment at every turn. Following the Greek philosopher Pyrrho, the neutralist thinks that since nothing can be known, standpoints should float freely, unanchored by the tethers of belief. The neutralist's counterpart is the "naked persuader"—someone who approaches argument like Plato's Callicles—clinging doggedly to preconceived beliefs and resisting any shift no matter how compelling the counterpoints (Ehninger 1970, 104).

Naked persuaders and neutralists each struggle with the process of critical interchange, but for different reasons. According to Ehninger (1970, 104), argumentation is a "person risking enterprise," and by entering into an argument, "a disputant opens the possibility that as a result of the interchange he too may be persuaded of his opponent's view, or, failing that, at least may be forced to make major alterations in his own" (see also Johnstone 1965; Natanson 1965). In this account, naked persuaders are hamstrung by their unwillingness to risk the possibility that the force of reason will prompt alteration of their views. Neutralists, on the other hand, prevent the "person risking enterprise" from ever getting off the ground in the first place, since they place nothing on the table to risk.

The challenge for disputants thus involves adopting stances vis-à-vis their standpoints that strike an appropriate balance between perspectives of the naked persuader and the neutralist. For Ehninger (1970, 104), such a balanced posture consists of "restrained partisanship," where advocates drive dialectic forward with tentative conviction, while remaining open to the possibility that the course of argument may dictate that their initial standpoints require amendment or retraction. Ehninger says that finding this delicate balance resembles the tuning of violin
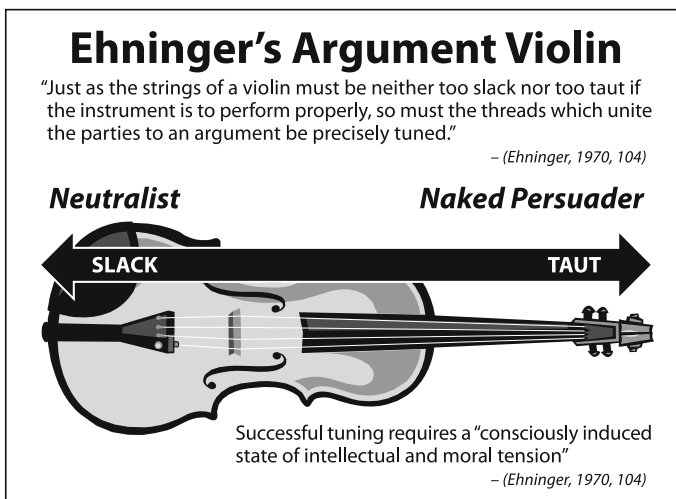
Douglas Ehninger. (1970). Argument as method: Its nature, its limitations and its causes. *Speech Monographs 37*, 101–10.

Fig. 1 Douglas Ehninger's concept of 'restrained partisanship' in argumentation expressed through a musical metaphor

strings—a metaphor that underscores his point that the proper stance of restrained partisanship must be tailored to fit each situation (see Fig. 1).

Similar conceptual categories are featured in pragma-dialectical argumentation theory, which aims to describe and normatively shape critical discussions. In a critical discussion, a protagonist advances a standpoint (acting like Ehninger's "persuader"), while the antagonist (similar to Ehninger's "neutralist") opposes the standpoint. While this comparison highlights points of overlap between Ehninger's theory of "argument as method" and pragma-dialectics, the match is not exact. For example, an interlocutor who embodies Ehninger's "naked persuader" character would approach argumentation like a proverbial bull in a china shop, hardly embracing the sort of proper "discussion attitude" that is a necessary "higher-order condition" for critical discussion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, 189). Just as Ehninger's account emphasizes the importance of arguers "tuning" their normative commitments to find a delicately balanced posture of "restrained partisanship," pragma-dialectical argumentation theory holds that proper execution of a critical discussion requires interlocutors to harmonize their rhetorical and dialectical aims (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002a, b).

In an important article published in this journal, Zarefsky (2006) elucidates a rationale for bridging rhetoric and dialectic. He does so by way of a specific example, showing how argumentative interlocutors maneuver strategically by utilizing the subtle power of persuasive definitions to gain the upper hand in arguments. This essay follows Zarefsky's lead by blending rhetorical and dialectical approaches to argumentation, but by focusing on a different aspect, namely, fine tuning of the "discussion attitude." Through analysis of the 2002–2003 prewar public argument on Iraq, it becomes possible to illuminate how poor tuning frustrates both critical discussion and Ehninger's "argument as method" of collective decision-making.

Deployment of argumentation theory to explain the prewar public controversy on Iraq promises to yield novel insight regarding the breakdown in social reasoning and institutional policy-making that occurred in that episode. On a theoretical level, such analysis points to the existence of previously untheorized modes of strategic maneuvering in a critical discussion and contributes to the ongoing project of bridging rhetorical and dialectical approaches to the study of argumentation. To the extent that this specific mode of strategic maneuvering helps explain institutional argumentation in the 2002–2003 prewar period, the essay makes a practical contribution to International Relations scholarship that strives to locate causes of the Iraq prewar intelligence failure not only in the flawed work products produced by intelligence agencies, but also in the communicative practices exhibited on the public stage.

1 Standpoint Commitment in a Critical Discussion

From a pragma-dialectical perspective, an argument is a "critical discussion" between interlocutors, undertaken for the purpose of resolving a difference of opinion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984; van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2003; van Eemeren et al. 1996, 274–311). The pragma-dialectical approach has both descriptive and normative force, with its rules of procedure striving to capture the

essence of how some critical discussants actually argue in practice, while also setting forth an ideal goal to which interlocutors can aspire. According to pragma-dialectics, interlocutors motivate the critical power of argumentation by expressing fidelity to these procedural rules ("first-order conditions"), and conducting themselves in a way consistent with "higher-order conditions" that prescribe necessary elements of an argumentative exchange (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004; see also Barth and Krabbe 1982). One such higher-order condition is that interlocutors approach the critical discussion with an appropriate "discussion attitude" (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002b, 142).

Here, it becomes apparent that pragma-dialectical theory presupposes the ability of interlocutors to enact a version of Ehninger's "restrained partisanship." Arguers are expected to advance standpoints clearly and with conviction, but also to couple this performance with a double gesture that signals a willingness to amend or retract such standpoints should they be refuted during the course of argument. As van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2002b) put it, "On the one hand, arguers may neglect their persuasive interests for fear of being perceived as unreasonable; on the other hand, in their assiduity to win the other party over to their side, they may neglect their commitment to the critical ideal" (142). This delicate balancing act challenges participants to find an appropriate middle ground between two poles that have served as perennial topics of inquiry for a wide variety of argumentation theorists.

Consider Chaim Perelman & Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's distinction between "discussion" and "debate." For Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), while discussion is a heuristic activity, "in which the interlocutors search honestly and without bias for the best solution to a controversial problem" (37), debate is eristic, where the focus is on "overpowering the opponent" (39), regardless of the truth of the propositions at hand. Occluded in this neat polarity, of course, is the subtle fact that discussion and debate are Siamese twins joined at the head. They cannot be fully separated without placing the argumentative enterprise at risk. For example, the activity that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca call "discussion" requires interlocutors to embrace, *to some extent*, a "debating" posture that moves them to contribute concrete standpoints to the conversation. This caveat does not deny that an overly aggressive debating stance runs at cross purposes with the heuristic goals of discussion, but it does, once again, point to the importance of finding that proper balance that Ehninger calls "restrained partisanship."

One can isolate other vectors of this pattern playing out in discussions about the proper role of argument in society. While Deborah Tannen (1998) thoroughly criticizes excessively adversarial and combative styles of debating, she points out that there is still value in constructive forms of argument that allow interlocutors to vet opposing viewpoints (see also Foss and Griffin 1995; Gilbert 1997; Makau and Marty 2001).

James Crosswhite (1996) provides another variation on this theme, with his distinction between argumentation as "inquiry" and argumentation as "persuasion." To elucidate the relationship between these categories, Crosswhite (1996, 256–58) compares inquiry with the "context of discovery" and persuasion with the "context of justification" in philosophy of science. In this scheme, argument-as-persuasion involves attempts to convince others of settled beliefs that have already been justified, while argument-as-inquiry is a process of discovery initiated to yield

new insights when clear answers may not yet be apparent. As Crosswhite (1996) explains: "There is a difference between the kind of reasoning we engage in when we have already made up our minds about some issue and simply need to persuade other people to take our side, and the kind of reasoning that goes on when we have not yet made up our minds but are trying to come to a conclusion ourselves" (256; see also Meiland 1989).

In pragma-dialectics, this distinction between modes of reasoning is connected to a corresponding differentiation between rhetoric and dialectic. Building on their earlier work (Houtlosser and Van Eemeren 1998a, b) by drawing on Leff (2000), Frans van Eemeren and Peter Houtlosser (2002a, 15–17) identify as rhetorical those aims and objectives that interlocutors pursue in their quest to achieve effective persuasion in a critical discussion. Alternately, dialectical obligations flow from the argumentative procedures that parties must respect in order for a critical discussion to proceed. Echoing the other theorists considered in the preceding paragraphs, van Eemeren and Houtlosser develop this polarity synergistically, arguing that rhetoric and dialectic are complementary concepts. If a critical discussion were an airplane, rhetoric would be the force that drives the propeller and dialectic would be the navigational system that keeps the aircraft calibrated and on course. Without a strong propeller (standpoint commitment by interlocutors), the plane cannot get off the ground. Without a sound navigational system (disputants' fealty to discussion norms), the plane cannot reach the destination point of mutually acceptable resolution of a difference of opinion.

In working out this relationship between rhetoric and dialectic, van Eemeren and Houtlosser have expounded another important concept—strategic maneuvering, which they say lies "at the heart of our efforts to develop an extended pragma-dialectical theory" (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2006a, 377). This concept stems from their insight that "there is indeed a potential discrepancy between pursuing dialectical objectives and rhetorical aims" (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002a, 16). Arguers want to persuade their counterparts to accept their standpoints, yet the passion driving such commitments may sometimes conflict with the procedural requirements for carrying on a critical discussion. Rather than declare that in these cases, dialectical obligations always trump rhetorical aims, van Eemeren and Houtlosser stipulate that interlocutors have a middle option of strategic maneuvering, a mode of arguing that bends the dialectical rules of critical discussion in a protagonist's rhetorical favor, yet stops just short of breaking them and thereby committing a fallacy. As they explain, strategic maneuvering entails "the balancing act of reconciling the simultaneous pursuit of dialectical and rhetorical objectives that arguers have to perform in the conduct of argumentative discourse" (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2006a, 377).

For example, in the context of establishing the burden of proof for a given critical discussion, interlocutors may engage in strategic maneuvering by highlighting certain features of their standpoints (e.g. scope, precision, moral content) so as to configure their burden of proof in a rhetorically advantageous way (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002a, 22–25; van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2003). In a later formulation, van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2006b) elucidate other argumentative strategies that constitute strategic maneuvering, such as "audience-directed

framing" of claims, and "purposive use of presentational devices" (383). Building on this work, Zarefsky (2006) shows how the strategic deployment of definitions constitutes another form of strategic maneuvering, while Agnes Van Rees (2006) explains argumentative dissociation as a form of strategic maneuvering. However, there are limits to this process. Taken too far, strategic maneuvering moves beyond bending the rules for critical discussion, resulting in a "fallacious derailment" of the discussion (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002a, 22–25).

While the exact location of this boundary line that separates legitimate strategic maneuvering from fallacious derailment remains elusive, it is clear that the concept of strategic maneuvering represents an inventive response to the theoretical challenge of developing sound accounts of the relationship between "discussion" and "debate" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969); "inquiry" and "persuasion" (Crosswhite 1996); and "dialectic" and "rhetoric" (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002a, 22–25; Zarefsky 2006). This same challenge drives Ehninger's (1970) effort to explain the complementary relationship between the "naked persuader" and "neutralist" outlined in the introduction to this essay.

Anticipating a key element of pragma-dialectical argumentation theory, Ehninger (1970, 102) explains that the speech act of joining an argument involves an implicit agreement that the exchange will exert bilateral influence on the argumentative process. This insight dovetails with his view that argument should be a "person risking" enterprise, and that by entering such an exchange, participants signal that they are ready to place their standpoints in middle space, where tentative commitment drives the exchange, yet is contingent on what transpires in the course of argument. Ehninger (1970, 104) elaborates on this posture of "restrained partisanship" by comparing it to the process of tuning a violin: "Just as the strings of a violin must be neither too slack nor too taut if the instrument is to perform properly, so must the threads which unite the parties to an argument be precisely tuned."

From the preceding discussion, we can begin to appreciate how strategic maneuvering works as a bridging concept that draws upon dialectical and rhetorical approaches to argumentation theory. When the concept is deployed as an analytical tool in service of a case study, it becomes possible to grasp in more concrete terms how the rhetorical and dialectical dimensions of strategic maneuvering play out in practice.

2 Reconstructing the Prewar Public Argument on Iraq

The US decision to invade Iraq in 2003 is widely perceived as an "intelligence failure," in large part because official investigations conducted by a presidential commission (US Commission 2005), a congressional panel (US Senate 2004), and the Pentagon (US DOD 2007) have explained the ill-fated preventive war as a bad policy outcome driven by poor data provided by official intelligence analysts to political leaders. While it is the case that the US Intelligence Community's prewar analyses on Iraq were imperfect, this is only part of the story. Journalists, citizens, members of Congress and the White House also played key roles in the breakdown.

According to Chaim Kaufmann (2004, 7), a "failure of the marketplace of ideas" resulted in breakdown of the US political system's ability to "weed out exaggerated threat claims and policy proposals based on them." Peter Neumann and Smith (2005, 96) call this phenomenon a "discourse failure," where "constriction of the language and vocabulary" produced a "failure of comprehension." Other analyses have drawn upon argumentation theory to explain dynamics of this "discourse failure" (see Mitchell 2006; Keller and Mitchell 2006). This article isolates a specific element of this phenomenon that has not yet received rigorous scrutiny—derailments in the process of public argument caused by poor tuning of the deliberative exchange with respect to discussion attitude.

In President George W. Bush's September, 2002 letter to Congress, he explained that since possible war with Iraq was "an important decision that must be made with great thought and care," he called for argumentation on the matter: "I welcome and encourage discussion and debate" (Bush 2002a). Bush (2002b) emphasized this point 2 days later during a fundraising luncheon, inviting "debate" on the Iraq situation, calling for "the American people to listen and have a dialog about Iraq," and for "an open discussion about the threats that face America." What exactly did these statements mean? From a pragma-dialectical argumentation perspective, they would seem to constitute "external" evidence that Bush sought to enter into a critical discussion with interlocutors, engaging in argumentation as a way to reach an informed decision on optimal US policy toward Iraq. On this reading, one would expect Bush to proceed as a protagonist in the critical discussion, advancing standpoints, listening to counterarguments, isolating key differences of opinion, and working toward resolution of those differences.

As we have seen, one key element of this mode of constructive participation in a critical discussion involves tentative standpoint commitment that seeks a middle ground between the postures of Ehninger's hypothetical interlocutors, the naked persuader and the neutralist. As Ehninger explains further, as disputants search for this middle ground, "investigation not only must precede decision, but is an integral part of the decision-making process" (Ehninger 1959, 284). In other words, a crucial part of an interlocutor's constructive argument stance involves deferral of a final decision pending completion of the exchange. This formulation resonates with the pragma-dialectical view that discussants must embrace a particular "discussion attitude" to fulfill necessary higher-order condition of a critical discussion. "For this kind of person, doubt is intrinsic to his attitude to life, and criticism a way of resolving problems. Argumentative discourse and texts are then seen as ways of tracing weak spots in standpoints," explain Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004). "Shielding standpoints from criticism (immunization) and every form of funda-mentalism are therefore to be opposed. This requires a non-dogmatic and anti-authoritarian approach and a distrust of unshakeable principles and claims to infallibility" (189).

In the case of President Bush's argument regarding US policy toward Iraq, Bush's own statements seemed to express commitment to these principles. After calling for the initiation of a debate on Iraq policy in September 2002, Bush set forth arguments justifying the ouster of Saddam Hussein, but also qualified these standpoints with gestures of "restrained partisanship" (Ehninger 1970, p. 104). For

example, during a 6 March 2003 press conference, Bush (2003) stated: "I've not made up our mind about military action."

However, recent disclosure of official documents and insider accounts complicate this picture. We now know that British intelligence chief Sir Richard Dearlove visited the US in July 2002 for meetings where the possibility of war against Iraq was discussed. Regarding developments in Washington, Dearlove briefed Prime Minister Tony Blair on 23 July 2002 that, "there was a perceptible shift in attitude. Military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy." The memo goes onto say that it "seemed clear the Bush had made up his mind to go to war, even if the timing was not yet decided" (Sunday Times 2005). According to National Security Archive Senior Fellow John Prados, the Dearlove memo shows, "with stunning clarity," that "the goal of overthrowing Saddam Hussein was set at least a year in advance," and that "President Bush's repeated assertions that no decision had been made about attacking Iraq were plainly false" (Prados 2005). Further evidence in support of this view comes from insider accounts of White House communication during the September 2002–March 2003 "discussion and debate" period. For example, journalist Bob Woodward explains that while Bush was publicly maintaining a posture of "restrained partisanship" during the public argument on Iraq, he privately told National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice in January 2003, "We're gonna have to go. It's war" (qtd. in Woodward 2004). Further, Woodward indicates that in another meeting that month, Bush wanted Saudi Prince Bandar "to know that this is for real. That we're really doing it" (Woodward 2004). A separate leaked British memorandum detailed that later in January 2003, Bush even gave British Prime Minister Blair a specific date (10 March 2003) when he should expect war against Iraq to commence (Regan 2003; see also Sands 2005).

Bearing in mind the tension between speech acts arrayed on the top portion of the timeline in Fig. 2 and the speech acts falling in the bottom portion of the timeline, it becomes apparent that Bush's (2003) statement on 6 March 2003 that "I've not made up our mind about military action" was a strategic maneuver, one designed to improve rhetorically his position in the unfolding public argument. The political windfall from such a statement is clear, given the political and military necessity that the decision to invade Iraq be justified on the basis of democratically sound procedures (see Payne 2006). But this returns us to the question that percolated out of the first section of this article—how should Bush's strategic maneuvering be classified? Was it a legitimate argumentative move, or something else altogether? Considering each possibility in turn provides an opportunity to apply and develop theoretical concepts regarding the role of standpoint commitment in argumentation.

3 Normatively Evaluating the Argument for War

A charitable interpretation of Bush's prewar rhetoric would explain the tension between his professed commitments to the process of critical discussion and his
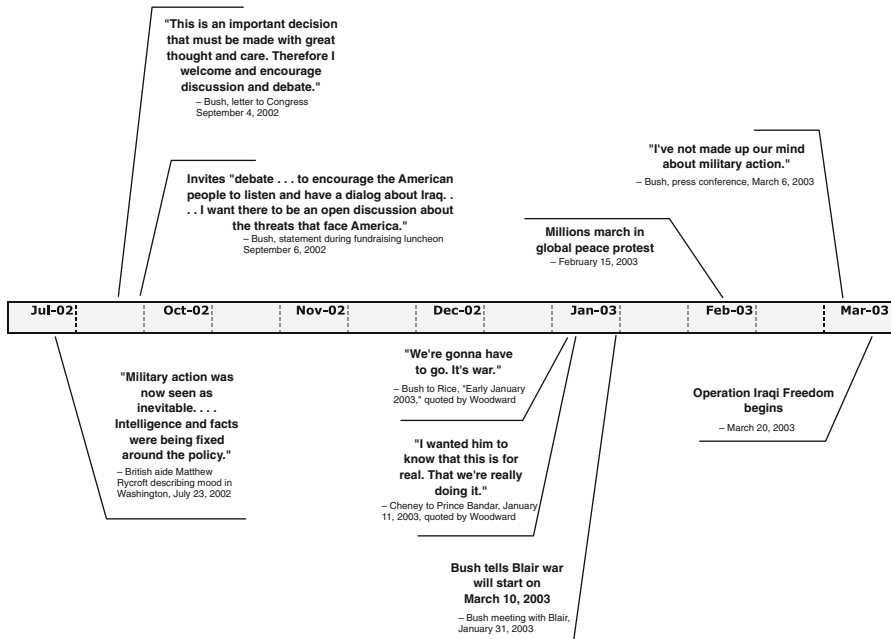
Fig. 2 Bush administration's Iraq prewar public statements (*top* of timeline) plotted versus private statements (*bottom* of timeline)

early private decision to invade Iraq as the product of legitimate strategic maneuvering, undertaken to enhance the persuasiveness of his rhetorical position in a critical discussion. In this reading, one might interpret Bush's private comments to Rice, Bandar and Blair as mere instances of contingency planning designed to prepare the groundwork for execution of a future, *official decision* to attack Iraq. Similarly, Bush's 6 March 2003 statement that, "I've not made up our mind about military action" could be seen as a subtle strategic maneuver designed to add purchase to his rhetorical appeals for war by projecting a generous deliberative posture. The soundness of this line of argumentative reconstruction would hinge on the degree to which it could be established that Bush's maneuvering stopped short of actually transgressing dialectical rules governing conduct of a critical discussion.

Alternately, it is possible to reconstruct the episode by interpreting Bush's rhetoric as a violation of higher-order conditions having to do with the proper discussion attitude necessary to engage in critical discussion. In this reading, Bush's 2002 statements regarding the desirability of debate, discussion and dialogue would be seen as speech acts that set into motion a cooperative process of critical discussion and concomitantly signaled a public commitment by Bush to adhere to certain dialectical rules governing conduct of the public argument (see Payne 2006). As discussed previously, one of the key responsibilities of an interlocutor in such a context is to maintain a stance of restrained partisanship vis-à-vis standpoints offered in the course of the critical discussion. However, it is plausible to conclude that such a "middle ground" stance would be impossible for a protagonist such as

Bush to maintain in a situation where he had already decided to act on his standpoint (Iraq should be invaded), while simultaneously continuing the critical discussion. On this reading, the excesses of Bush's rhetoric overwhelmed his commitment to dialectical norms of argumentation, resulting in failed exchange.

A third possible reconstruction of the episode would proceed from the premise that Bush never actually performed a speech act that signaled commitment to norms of critical discussion. This interpretation would frame Bush's September 2002 statements regarding the need for "dialogue" and "debate" on Iraq as announcements that a peculiar form of argumentation was about to commence, one perhaps consistent with Ehninger's (1970, 101) model of "corrective coercion." According to Ehninger, protagonists in this mode operate unilaterally: "Not only does the corrector initiate the exchange and direct it throughout its history, but he also dictates the conditions under which it will terminate." Furthermore, in corrective coercion, unlike the "person-risking" enterprise of cooperative argumentation, standpoints are not contingent, since failure to persuade interlocutors is an outcome that indicates deficiency in the passive audience, not the standpoint being advocated: "If, in spite of the corrector's best efforts, the correctee stubbornly continues to resist, the corrector may attribute his failure to a breakdown in communication or an inability to summon the necessary degree of authority; or he may write the correctee off as ignorant or incorrigible" (Ehninger 1970, 102). This perspective on the prewar argument reconfigures the relationship between Bush's public and private statements from one of tension to one of consistency. Arguers engaging in coercive correction need not worry about fine-tuning their degrees of standpoint commitment, since the purpose of the argument is not to test or refine their positions. Here, Bush's statements to Rice, Bandar and Blair indicating that he had already decided the outcome of the dispute regarding the proper course of US policy toward Iraq can be squared with his public arguments designed to coerce audiences to accept the same view.

Analysts trying to determine which reconstruction of Bush's argumentation is most accurate may find the critical task challenging. As van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2006b) point out, since "fallacious strategic maneuvering seems to comply with the critical discussion rules, but does not" (388), it may "not be apparent to all concerned that a fallacy has been committed" (387). This caveat stretches the parameters of early pragma-dialectical argumentation theory, which endorsed the principle of "externalization," the notion that analysts should primarily base assessments of argumentative practice on manifest elements of contributions to a critical discussion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984, 5–6). With the rhetorical elements of strategic maneuvering receiving more attention, pragma-dialecticians have adjusted their critical posture slightly, clarifying in recent work that fallacy judgments may rest more heavily on contextual factors that are specific to each situation where argumentation unfolds.

> In principle, each type of strategic maneuvering has, as it were, its own continuum of sound and fallacious acting and the boundaries between the two are not in all cases crystal clear. More often than not, fallacy judgments are in the end contextual judgments that depend on the specific circumstances of

situated argumentative acting. The criteria for determining whether or not a certain norm for critical discussion has been violated may be dependent on the institutional conventions of the argumentative activity type concerned regarding how argumentative discourse is disciplined…. (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2006b, 388).

For example, van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2006b) explain that parties may bring different normative presuppositions to the table in distinctive "argumentative activity types" such as public debates in the Dutch parliament or interrogations in Dutch criminal proceedings (389). Thus, it would seem incumbent on the analyst seeking to normatively evaluate episodes of strategic maneuvering to apprehend and apply the context-specific conventions and expectations governing the conduct of argumentation in each setting (cf. Toulmin 1988; Willard 1979).

In cases where discussion rules are clearly codified, or where a rich tradition of critical discussion offers a storehouse of informal precedents governing deliberative exchanges for specific argumentative activity types, it may be relatively straight-forward to locate the contextual background knowledge needed to generate meaningful distinctions between reasonable strategic maneuvering and fallacious derailment. But consider instances where nascent discussion norms have not yet stabilized, or where new forms of argumentation break out in situations that have few historical precedents. Here, a lack of detail in the contextual backdrop complicates matters, for both practitioners and critics.

The Iraq prewar public argument appears to present just such a case, featuring an extended debate on the proposed use of preventive force against an adversary that posed no imminent security threat. Lacking clear guidelines and expectations governing the unprecedented "open discussion" and "debate" instigated in September 2002 by President Bush, discussants were left to argue in an ambiguous space filled with strategic maneuvering.

In hindsight, it is clear that the ensuing public argument was characterized by widely divergent understandings of the level of contingency involved in the discussion's central bone of contention—Bush's proposition that the US should launch a preventive war of choice to depose Saddam Hussein. Many among the millions of war critics who attended coordinated demonstrations on 15 February 2003 likely viewed their arguments as contributions to an unresolved public debate. Such impressions were surely bolstered by Bush's (2003) apparent assertion of contingency in statements such as: "I've not made up our mind about military action."

However, as we have seen, there was a discernible gap between the literal meaning of such statements and the position taken by Bush in private conversations with Rice, Blair and Bandar regarding the inevitability of war. While the presence of such a gap could be explained as the product of strategic maneuvering, the normative status of Bush's argumentative move depends on one's critical judgments regarding the appropriate degree of standpoint contingency in prewar public deliberations concerning use of preventive force. Is it appropriate for a president to enter such deliberations in a "person-risking" mode, leaving open the possibility that critical counter-arguments could result in a change of position? Or is public

debate in this argumentative activity type more akin to political theater, where going through the motions of critical discussion rallies the public behind a war policy already set in place behind the scenes?

James Klumpp's (2006) keynote address and Kathryn Olson's reply at the 2005 NCA/AFA Summer Conference on Argumentation shed important light on this question. On Klumpp's interpretation, the Bush administration's appeal for preventive war against Iraq resembled an academic debating case, replete with argumentative vocabulary such as "presumption," "burden of proof," and "evidence," leading him to classify the Bush case for war as an instance of deliberative rhetoric (borrowing from Aristotle's conceptual scheme). Accordingly, Klumpp positions argumentation scholars as key social actors capable of understanding, assessing, and critically testing the administration's case.

Rather than seeing the Bush administration's arguments for war against Iraq as a straightforward debate brief falling within the genre of deliberative rhetoric, Olson proposes that we make sense of the Bush officials' argumentation as epideictic, or ceremonial, rhetoric. The salience of this distinction is underscored by the degree to which these two rhetorical genres differ. As Olson points out, deliberative rhetoric is oriented toward collective decision-making, whereas epideictic speeches entail assignment of praise or blame. Deliberative rhetoric hails members of a community as participants in the discussion, while epideictic performances position the audience in a spectator role. Finally, evidentiary standards vary across genres, with audiences generally holding deliberative speakers to a higher proof standard than their epideictic counterparts. Olson's analysis thus positions President Bush's prewar argumentation as epideictic, or ceremonial, speech packaged to "pass" as deliberative rhetoric, with the nomenclature of critical discussion serving as the packaging. Recast in pragma-dialectical terminology, Olson's interpretation frames the argumentation in question as an instance of higher-order strategic maneuvering, with President Bush projecting a discussion attitude consistent with the aims of a critical discussion.

While there has been much attention focused on the performance of the official U.S. Intelligence Community during the run-up to the 2003 Iraq War, less energy has been spent dwelling on the issues raised by the Klumpp-Olson exchange. Their contribution points to the possibility that a key slippage in reasoning that contributed to the overall public deliberation breakdown concerned confusion about the discussion attitude being adopted by respective interlocutors. While international relations scholars such as Chaim Kaufmann have elucidated ways that the White House utilized its asymmetrical advantages in information access to control public dialogue, the preceding discussion illustrates that higher-order strategic maneuvering at the level of discussion attitude may have also played a major role in this respect, by enabling the Bush administration's epideictic rhetoric to be wrapped in the patina of deliberation and critical discussion. It may be crucial to come to terms with this phenomenon, since neglect of it may leave intact the underlying factors responsible for "discourse failure" (Neumann and Smith 2005) in this case, leaving the door open to future failures and miscalculations.

The need for better fine-tuning of deliberative norms with respect to standpoint commitment in preventive war deliberation underscores the importance of a form of

meta-argument that seems to fall outside traditional pragma-dialectical critical discussion categories. Perhaps this type of exchange can be characterized as the "post-concluding" phase of a critical discussion, where parties look back at a settled dispute and reflect on how their experience shapes emergent norms governing strategic maneuvering for that particular argumentative activity type. As Thomas Farrell (1993) explains, the quintessentially rhetorical action flowing from such dialogue generates "social knowledge," commonly held notions of acceptable public behavior. In this context, social knowledge works as the connective tissue that links together discrete episodes of argumentation that take place under the umbrella of a particular activity type, yielding for discussants (and critics) the normative resources to distinguish reasonable strategic maneuvering from fallacious derailment in episodes of argumentation yet to come.

4 Rhetorically Fine-Tuning Strategic Maneuvering Norms

The relationship between rhetoric and dialectic is moving up the research agenda in argumentation studies (Blair 2003; Zarefsky 2006). In pragma-dialectical argumentation theory, the concept of strategic maneuvering is emerging as a bridging concept to elucidate the rhetoric-dialectic interplay (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2006a). Strategic maneuvering's value in this regard hinges in part on the degree to which theorists can elucidate perspicacious distinctions between reasonable rhetorical maneuvers and fallacious derailments of critical discussions. This essay explores how a focus on standpoint commitment offers a means of generating such distinctions, and how Ehninger's (1970) notions of "restrained partisanship" and the "argument violin" help to peg the appropriate degree of standpoint commitment in any given argument. Ehninger suggests that for cooperative argumentation to proceed constructively, it is incumbent on interlocutors to seek a "consciously induced state of intellectual and moral tension" that fine-tunes, like violin strings, their rhetorical aims and dialectical obligations (104; see also Ehninger and Brockriede 1966).

Application of these theoretical concepts to a case study concerning public argument prior to the 2003 Iraq War yields several insights. Most basically, the attempt to reconstruct the prewar public argument highlights the salience of Gerald Graff's (2003) observation: "Which mode we are in—debate or dialogue?—is not always self-evident" (88). External cues apparently signaling an interlocutor's commitment to the process of critical discussion may take on different meanings when viewed in light of subsequent strategic maneuvering. For example, one possible reconstruction of George W. Bush's contributions to the prewar public argument on Iraq reveals that his utterances expressing commitment to processes of "debate" and "discussion" signal something very different from the sorts of speech acts that in pragma-dialectical argumentation theory indicate an interlocutor's implied acceptance of critical discussion norms.

The gap between Bush's professed commitment to standpoint contingency and the actual status of his war decision reflects a form of strategic maneuvering that has yet to receive systematic theoretical treatment from argumentation scholars. This

move entails the attempt to reap a rhetorical windfall from cosmetic dedication to dialectic, when the interlocutor's actual objective is pure persuasion (Ehninger's 'argument as corrective'). As the case of prewar argumentation on Iraq illustrates, such maneuvering can be leveraged by ad hominem attacks that question the character of interlocutors who take the bait of the dialectic invitation and respond with pointed counter-arguments (English et al. 2007).

One cautionary conclusion to be drawn here is that when generating argumentative reconstructions, analysts should remain alert to the possibility that they are dealing with mixed disputes, where parties approach the argument from incommensurate normative assumptions regarding proper conduct of the dispute. The lucid exchange between Klumpp (2006) and Olson (2006) illustrates why it is imprudent for practitioners or critics to presume that an interlocutor's external statements regarding their discussion attitude aligns precisely with their actual performative stance in a critical discussion. A better stance puts the analyst on the lookout for gaps between statements and practice, with any resulting gaps taken as evidence of strategic maneuvering. Such strategic maneuvering can then be subjected to normative evaluation, using context-dependent evaluation tools drawn from the specific argumentation activity type in question. Critical findings from this evaluation process should help analysts peg the degree to which interlocutors successfully enact Ehninger's posture of "restrained partisanship" in particular disputes.

This critical reading strategy positions rhetoric vis-à-vis dialectic in a novel fashion that has not been featured previously in pragma-dialectics. More than the art of persuading audiences, rhetoric is here the activity that generates contextual social knowledge about informal rules of discussion governing critical discussions in particular activity types: "So when issues are contested, an interlocutor must be prepared to offer valid reasons for how the rules, procedures, and practices of a particular forum are shaped so as to regulate and encourage valid argument across recurrent situations" (Goodnight 1993, 339). Accordingly, rhetorical analysis looks beyond the surface of disputes to explain how arguments shape prevailing conventions that enable practitioners and critics to dissociate reasonable strategic maneuvering from fallacious derailments. It is encouraging that van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2006b) signal a willingness to entertain such broader definitions of rhetoric (390, n.1), since a more capacious formulation of rhetorical action in the context of argumentation clears the way to integrate some of the most powerful theoretical tools of American argumentation studies (e.g. social knowledge and controversy) into pragma-dialectics.

Zarefsky's work (2006) on persuasive definitions demonstrates how strategic maneuvering is a fecund bridging concept, one capable of supporting robust theoretical innovation that spans the rhetoric-dialectic divide. His analysis of how discussants' definitional moves can be understood as forms of strategic maneuvering builds on Houtlosser and van Eemeren's (1998a, b) early work on shifting the burden of proof and Van Rees' (2006) later treatment of dissociation. To this existing catalogue of strategic maneuvers, it may now be appropriate to add strategic maneuvering that involves shading one's higher-order discussion attitude for rhetorical effect.

A more textured understanding of higher-order strategic maneuvering suggests that transparency of an interlocutor's discussion attitude can help fine-tune

argumentative exchange, enabling discussants to apprehend the degree to which their counterparts understand each other's respective level of commitment to the standpoints they advance. Lack of transparency can be a recipe for derailment of a critical discussion, as the prewar public argument on Iraq demonstrates. Failure to properly "tune" the discussion in that case led to a breakdown in public argument that enabled an ill-fated preventive war of choice to become national US military policy. President Bush and his critics seemed to be approaching the argument from a similar "disagreement space," yet Klumpp and Olson show how this surface similarity may have been only cosmetic, occluding dramatic differences in discussion attitude that correlate roughly with the difference between deliberative and epideictic rhetorical genres.

This essay opened by considering Ehninger's notion of argumentation as a "person risking enterprise." Ehninger was a Cold War scholar, with his academic career beginning shortly after his stint as an intelligence officer during World War II, and spanning the bulk of the Cold War period until his retirement in the late 1970s (McGee 2001). Despite his direct experience as a foreign policy practitioner, Ehninger's theory of argumentation was never deployed systematically as an analytical tool to explain the conduct of international relations. This is not surprising, given the marginalization of Ehninger's subject matter—human communication—by International Relations (IR) scholars working during Ehninger's time. In fact, realism, IR's dominant paradigm during the Cold War, tends to view the world as a place where the behavior of nation-states can be explained with reference to the relatively fixed parameters of stable national interests and identities (Morganthau 1948; Waltz 1979), with communication serving as mere "cheap talk" that does little more than carry (often unreliable) diplomatic signals from one state to another.

Yet the events of February 15, 2003 dramatize the extent to which things have changed in the post-Cold War world. On that day, some 6–10 million people in approximately 800 cities around the world joined together in a coordinated protest against the impending US invasion of Iraq. Although the protest did not succeed in blocking the war, the collective voice of a transnational civil society spoke volumes about ways that internetworked communication technology and globalization have heightened the salience of argumentation as an increasingly prominent factor in international relations (see Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1999; Mitchell 2008; Risse 2000). Ehninger's "argument as method," received in its time as a valuable contribution to communication theory, is now more relevant than ever. The project of retrieving Ehninger's insights and adapting them for analysis of contemporary politics is facilitated greatly by recent innovations in argumentation theory, such as the concept of strategic maneuvering, that clear space for rhetorical and dialectical perspectives on argumentation to develop in tandem.

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