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Speaking Freely in a Time of War

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Speaking Freely in a Time of War

Barry Mauer

Abstract:

Anti-speech advocates have made several arguments aimed at critics of the Iraq War. Many of these anti-speech arguments are enthymemes. If the purpose of these rhetors is to deceive others into accepting a weak claim, then enthymemes are ideal forms because they hide the weakest parts of the argument. By exposing their hidden premises, the parts that are implicit but left unstated, I demonstrate that the anti-speech arguments used against critics of the war are not sound. This essay examines the logos, ethos, and pathos in these anti-speech arguments.

Essay:

"I think this war is an attempt by President Bush to concentrate his hold on power," said Barry Mauer, 37, an English Professor at the University of Central Florida. "This [war] is clearly a power grab." (*Orlando Sentinel*, 2003)

The day my quote appeared in the Orlando Sentinel, I received this response by email:

My father was a WWII Navy veteran. He served on an aircraft carrier (USS Enterprise CV6). He passed away 2 years ago, but NEVER forgot what he fought for over 50 years before. I was lucky enough to turn 18 during a peaceful time, and as the draft (and registration) were done away with. But I have NEVER forgotten what these brave soldiers sacrificed in order for me to live free. I played taps for Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies. I played taps at Veterans' funerals. This was just a tiny payback to them for all they did for ALL OF US. At my father's funeral, I watched these feeble but proud WWII Veterans fold the American flag that they presented my mother. You are a disgrace to the memory of my father and all those who preceded him in death so that you would have the freedom to speak your mind.

Your assertion that "this war is clearly a power grab" shows your lack of rational thinking. Liberals are controlled only by emotions. Logic never comes into play. Facts only get in the way. You hide behind the veil of academic freedom. You have every right to speak your mind, but words have consequences. That is why I exercise my right to accuse you of being anti-American.

God Bless President Bush

God Bless America!! (Garry Eaton, personal communication, April 18, 2003)

This email is typical of several anti-speech responses I received, filled with arguments aimed at shutting up critics of the Iraq War. By defining anti-war critics as anti-American, this rhetor attempts to define all such critics as members of an outgroup, susceptible to threats ("consequences") that don't apply to members of the ingroup: i.e. war supporters. His argument is not aimed at the contents of the anti-war critic's speech, though it mentions the anti-war critic's claim; rather, it is aimed at the critic himself.

Those who oppose Washington's imperial and totalitarian impulses are branded "anti-Americans." Regis Debray, writing about past colonial powers, answers thus: "The free man is not anti-American, but anti-imperial. America (now) revisits the time of colonizers drunk on their superiority, convinced of their liberating mission, and counting on reimbursing themselves directly." (Margolis, 2004)

Many of the anti-speech arguments made by pro-war advocates are enthymemes. If the purpose of these rhetors is to deceive others into accepting a weak claim, then enthymemes are ideal forms because they hide the weakest parts of the argument. By exposing their hidden premises, the parts that are implicit but left unstated, I demonstrate that the anti-speech arguments used against critics of the war are not sound. This essay examines the logos, ethos, and pathos in these anti-speech arguments.

Because the hidden premises I expose are unstated, I admit to a certain imprecision in describing them. This is a necessary part of the process, however, and any misrepresentations can be corrected should those making the arguments choose to step forward and re-state them.

Most deductive arguments do not use complete syllogisms--which are three-part arguments with a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. Rather they use *enthymemes*, which are syllogisms with at least one part unstated. A classic enthymeme was used during a protest joined by Martin Luther King of garbage workers in Memphis. The workers held signs saying simply, "I am a man." (Turner, 2002) This proposition was the minor premise. The major premise and conclusion were left unstated.

Sample enthymeme:

Major premise (unstated): All men are created equal and are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights . . .

Minor premise: I am a man.

Conclusion (unstated): Therefore I deserve equal treatment and recognition of my rights.

The receiver of an enthymeme has to supply the missing parts. By doing so, the receiver completes a logical circuit and persuades himself.

Some of the best arguments are enthymemes, but so are some of the worst arguments. If the purpose of the rhetor is to deceive others into accepting a weak claim, then enthymemes are ideal forms because they hide the weakest parts of the argument.

Logos

Logical arguments appeal to the intellect of the audience. If the premises are true and the reasoning is valid, then the conclusion must be true. However, it is often the case in arguments that the premises are false, that the reasoning is invalid, or both. In the section below I present analysis of flawed logical arguments made by anti-speech advocates.

The author of the above letter claims that his father sacrificed so that I may speak my mind. His claim is built upon the assumption that only troops can defend freedom of speech.

Argument 1: Soldiers Defend Free Speech

Major premise (hidden): Soldiers defend the rights of all to free speech.

Minor premise: You are not a soldier.

Conclusion: You cannot defend the rights of all to free speech.

Analysis: In this argument, the major premise is false. Soldiers do not, in all cases, defended others' freedom of speech. Although I am not a soldier, I could defend a co-worker's freedom of speech by creating a forum for her to express her view. Even people under violent assault can turn to non-soldiers to help them defend their freedom of speech. Such was the case during the Civil Rights era when southern blacks, under assault from Jim Crow, turned to Martin Luther King, Jr. a non-violent activist, for help in defending their free speech. Soldiers helped in the Civil Rights struggle as well, but only when ordered to do so. There is no certain link between soldiers and the defense of free speech; soldiers can be ordered to defend it or to violate it.

One anti-speech advocate wrote to me: "the troops are risking their lives to give you the very right which you are so ironically, (sic) now using to attack the very government that sent them to protect this right in others." (Ryan Gibbons, personal correspondence, April 23, 2003)

Should we think it "ironic" to use a right that we have? It would be ironic indeed if we did not use our right to free speech when it most counted.

Argument 2: The Effectiveness of Soldiers

Major premise (partially hidden): Since U.S. soldiers defend our right to speak freely, anything that weakens the effectiveness of soldiers undermines our free speech.

Minor premise: Criticism of the military or the administration in control weakens the effectiveness of soldiers.

Conclusion: Critics of the military or the administration must be isolated, vilified, and intimidated because they undermine our free speech.

Analysis: The major premise is false because it presumes that the primary purpose of soldiers' activities is to defend free speech. In the case of the Iraq war, there was no clear connection between the actions of U.S. soldiers in Iraq and the defense of free speech in the U.S. Rather, the opposite was true. We heard a demand to suppress criticism of the Bush administration and "Support our troops!" The massive PR campaign spouting this slogan was an effective effort to divert attention from the policy itself. If the slogan were honest, it would have stated, "Support our policy!" or "Support our war!"

The minor premise is false because there are many cases in which there is no causal relation between criticism of the military or critics of the administration and any weakening of military effectiveness. Some criticism may even improve military effectiveness: one example would be the claim that U.S. chemical warfare suits were of poor quality. (Donnelly, 2002) Although it turned out that the Iraqis had no chemical weapons, a point that U.N. inspections and defectors' statements had made somewhat obvious, (UNCOM, 1995) if there had been a chemical weapons attack, many U.S. soldiers would have become casualties because of their faulty suits. Many anti-war critics pointed out that soldiers are most effective when they are *not* used in combat; such was the case in the months before the U.S. and British troops attacked Iraq, when these troops backed up the U.N. inspections teams with the threat of force.

We heard from many anti-speech advocates that criticism of the U.S. government was tantamount to sympathizing with the enemy and thus endangering our troops. (Horowitz, 2002) This view represents a failure of imagination, however, for it is possible to sympathize with the people of Iraq, who are victims of Saddam Hussein and of American bombing, without sympathizing with Saddam Hussein. It is also possible simultaneously to sympathize with American troops, many of whom have died needlessly in a war that may have little justification other than the greed and fanaticism of a few powerful people tied to Bush.

The greatest threat to military effectiveness has come not from critics of the war but from the Bush administration itself. Among the charges against the Bush administration on these counts is the following: "Issues of principle aside, the invasion of a country that hadn't attacked us and didn't pose an imminent threat has seriously weakened our military position. Of the Army's 33 combat brigades, 16 are in Iraq; this leaves us ill prepared to cope with genuine threats. Moreover, military experts say that with almost two-thirds of its brigades deployed overseas, mainly in Iraq, the Army's readiness is eroding: normal doctrine calls for only one brigade in three to be deployed abroad, while the other two retrain and refit." (Krugman, 2003)

Anti-speech advocates sometimes use the argument that critics of the war "demoralized" the soldiers. Perhaps criticism of the war does demoralize some soldiers, though that is not its intent. Is demoralizing soldiers somehow worse than sending them to die in an unjust war? None of the 460+ U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq so far have died as a result of any anti-war criticism. It is rare to hear anyone state the conclusion to this argument--that critics of the military or the administration must be isolated, vilified, and intimidated because they undermine our free speech--because it is clearly contradictory; one cannot intimidate critics and claim to uphold free speech at the same time.

One of the anti-speech advocates I cited above, however, did just that. He wrote: "You are right in concluding that critics of the military or the administration must be isolated, vilified and intimidated . . . because we as free speakers have the right to do this as a majority. If you do not like the government, that is fine with all of us. You just need to be prepared to take the 'intimidation' from us when it comes flying at you." (Ryan [last name unknown], personal correspondence, April 23, 2003)

Intimidation and the atmosphere it produces are incompatible with free speech values. The case articulated by this rhetor--that the intimidation tactics practiced by members of the majority constitute a form of free speech--is clearly flawed. The form of "speech" he advocates flows only in one direction: from the mouths of bullies to the less powerful. The email I quoted above accuses me of being "anti-American." This term is used frequently to describe critics of administration policies. Most critics of the war love America, however, and don't want to see it hurt by false patriots. Only in a repressive state would accusations such as "anti-American" be heard routinely. At times, such as the civil rights era, the government enacted legislation to protect the speech of the less powerful. This is not one of those times. In these times, even Republicans are attacked viciously for straying from the party line even slightly. (AP, 2003)

The anti-speech advocate continues:

Criticism . . . needlessly undermines the government. Our nation cannot be run without the support of its citizens. The voice of one influences many, and fools are prone to listening to and acting upon rebellious voices they hear when they would otherwise have a simple void where that undermining voice takes hold. In light of this, it is a needless endangerment not to our troops, but to our nation itself to criticize the government and its worthy officials in such a way. (Ryan [last name unknown], personal correspondence, April 23, 2003)

The undemocratic sentiments in this remark are stunning. Does one "undermine" our government by trying to keep it honest? In a democracy, or in a republic with democratic values, the people lead and the government must be responsive to them. To prevent tyranny from developing in a democracy, people must be free to criticize their government. Note the dangerous conflation of the "nation" and the "government" in this writer's remark, a common move in totalitarian countries. Also note the writer's notion of "fools" following rebellious voices. Such an argument implies that fools only follow but do not lead, though there are numerous examples of fools leading. It also implies that fools are only threatening when incited to action by *rebellious* voices, though never threatening when incited by the regimenting voices of those in power. Clearly there are cases of regimenting voices causing great harm to nations.

John Dean writes:

As Ohio's Republican Senator Robert A. Taft, a man whose patriotism cannot be questioned, remarked less than two weeks after Pearl Harbor, "[C]riticism in time of war is essential to the maintenance of any kind of democratic government.... [T]he maintenance of the right of criticism in the long run will do the country ... more good than it will do the enemy [who might draw comfort from it], and it will prevent mistakes which might otherwise occur." (Dean, 2003)

Argument 3: Enemies of Free Speech

Major premise (hidden): If the U.S. were to be invaded and occupied by an enemy who didn't believe in free speech, we would lose our free speech.

Minor premise: We are fighting an enemy who doesn't believe in free speech.

Conclusion: We must defeat this enemy in order to maintain our free speech.

Analysis: A true threat to U.S. sovereignty, such as the Axis powers during World War II, might make this argument sound. When anti-speech advocates used this argument earlier this year, they implied that Iraq would give weapons of mass destruction to terrorists who would attack the United States, presumably stripping away our freedom of speech in the process. This fear does seem to be unfounded, given that the U.S. had no solid proof that Iraq had WMDs and no solid proof that it had ties to Al-Qaeda.

The anti-speech advocate also made this comment:

Even if the threat (of weapons of mass destruction) was nonexistent, Saddam and his regime need to be ousted and replaced by a government that does not suppress its religious majority, gas a hated minority and oppress its people in other such ways. (Ryan [last name unknown], personal correspondence, April 23, 2003)

This writer apparently missed the irony produced by his statements; he believes it is necessary to support the voices of dissent in Iraq and to suppress the voices of dissent in the U.S.

Argument 4: Needless Endangerment

Major premise: Speech that needlessly endangers other people, like yelling "fire" in a crowded theater, is not protected speech.

Minor premise: Criticism of the war needlessly endangers the troops.

Conclusion: Criticism of the war is not protected speech.

Analysis: In this argument, the minor premise is questionable at best. If the war itself is needless, then the war itself certainly endangers the troops needlessly. It is not criticism of the war that endangers the troops, it is the war itself, an unnecessary war at that.

It is justifiable to yell "fire" in a crowded theater if there really is a fire. In fact, even if a person thinks there is a fire, he is justified in yelling "fire" because of the precautionary principle, which indicates that it is less risky to yell "fire" and be wrong than it is not to yell "fire" and be right. For example, if you smell smoke in a crowded theater, you are justified in yelling "fire." It is unjustified and malicious to yell "fire" in a crowded theater if you have no evidence that there is a fire.

Let us test this argument in relation to the Iraq war. Several U.S. intelligence experts stated that the Iraq war would pose a threat to Americans; they argued that instead of reducing the threat of terrorism, the Iraq war would increase the threat of terrorism. (Slevin, 2003) Their warnings are similar to that of the person who smells smoke and yells "fire" in a crowded theater. They had evidence--the "smoke"--that al-Qaeda was using the Iraq war as a recruiting tool. On May 12, 2003, within weeks after the conclusion of major hostilities in Iraq, al-Qaeda suicide attackers struck again, this time in Saudi Arabia, killing dozens of people, including eight Americans, and wounding dozens more. The intelligence agents' warnings were accurate. (Norton-Taylor, 2003) They were certainly within their rights to warn others about the threat of "fire"--impending terrorist attacks as a result of the Iraq war.

In contrast to the intelligence agents, George W. Bush is like the person without evidence of a fire yelling "fire" in a crowded theater. For example, Bush said that Iraq was acquiring enriched uranium, a key component in the development of nuclear weapons, thus implying that Iraq could become an imminent threat to the United States. The "evidence" for this claim was a forged document. It appears that the Bush administration knew their claims were phony. (Wilson, 2003, Waxman, 2003) Also, both Bush and Colin Powell have stated that the Iraqi regime was allied with al-Qaeda, a claim made without solid evidence and one that most American intelligence agencies did not support. (Risen, 2003, Kristoff, 2003) Falsifying and exaggerating threats in order to take a country into war qualifies as an unjustified use of speech, analogous to yelling "fire" in a crowded theater.

Many anti-speech advocates, including participants on the websites FreeRepublic and RightNation, have attacked other, myself included, for using the word "imminent" to describe Bush's characterization of the Iraq threat. They claim that Bush never described Iraq as an "imminent threat" and that anyone who claims that he did is a liar. The moderators at FreeRepublic permanently barred me for making this claim. Yet the evidence suggests Bush and members of his administration did in fact make claim that the threat posed by Iraq was imminent. In his recent film "Uncovered," Director Robert Greenwald offers a montage that begins with Bush saying, "Delay, indecision and inaction could lead to a massive and sudden horror." It cuts to Rice, who says, "It simply makes no sense to wait any longer." Rumsfeld: "Take action, before it's too late." Bush: "We will not wait." Cheney: "As President Bush has said, time is not on our side." (Goldberg, 2003) Without an imminent threat, there is no justification for a "pre-emptive" strike.

The Iraq war endangered U.S. troops, Iraqi citizens, (Jeffery, 2003) and American citizens who now face greater risk of terrorist reprisals as a result of the war.

Ethos

Ethical arguments are appeals to the credibility (expertise and trustworthiness) of the person making a particular claim. Ethical arguments in general depend upon a syllogistic logic:

Ethical Argument

Major premise: People of good (expert and trustworthy) character only make good (true and virtuous) arguments.

Minor premise: The speaker is a person of good character.

Conclusion: The speaker must be making a good argument.

Analysis: Revealed in its stark form, the syllogism supporting ethical reasoning seems particularly weak. It is so weak, in fact, that science rejects it in principle (though scientists often resort to it in practice).

Leaving aside the obvious issue of human fallibility--even the most expert and trustworthy people are sometimes wrong--the ethical syllogism has numerous flaws. One obvious problem: a true statement remains true no matter who utters it. In other words, the soundness of a claim, or the validity of a chain of reasoning, has nothing to do with the character of the speaker. Truth claims must be tested *independently* of

the speaker in order to be verified. Another obvious problem: the traits associated with credibility, such as expertise and trustworthiness, are not inborn traits; they are gained over time and can be lost. Also, these traits can be "faked" (such was the theme of the Spielberg film *Catch Me If You Can*). With these caveats in mind, consider the following arguments made by anti-speech advocates.

Argument 1: Secret Knowledge

Major Premise (hidden): Claims made on the basis of secret knowledge are true and invalidate other claims.

Minor premise: The Bush Administration had secret knowledge about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Conclusion: The Bush Administration's claims about Iraq must be true and therefore must invalidate all other claims.

I received this argument from an anti-speech advocate. He argued that Bush had secret knowledge about Iraqi weapons that antiwar critics didn't have and therefore Bush was credible when he warned us about Iraq. He wrote, "Does this also not constitute an appropriate warning since he undoubtedly (sic) has more information than you or I?" (Ryan Gibbons, personal correspondence, April 23, 2003)

This kind of ethical argument appeals to secrets as a way to support a claim of expertise. Since the speaker claims to know of someone who has secret knowledge that justifies his argument, then all other arguments not based on this secret knowledge are necessarily invalid. The glaring flaw in this argument is that any evidence that remains secret cannot be independently verified. The Bush administration has resorted to defending a large number of secrets on the basis of "protecting national security." It is impossible to prove or disprove such claims and it is rather obvious that such claims are convenient ways to construct a false appearance of credibility. One should be suspicious of claims to credibility built on secrets.

Argument 2: Sacrifice

Major premise (partially hidden): Soldiers sacrifice themselves selflessly on behalf of the collective and are thus protected from criticism by a sacred force.

Minor premise: My father (brother, etc.) is a soldier.

Conclusion: My father (brother, etc.) sacrificed himself selflessly on behalf of the collective and is thus protected from criticism by a sacred force.

Every nation that has a military has a kind of civil religion devoted to honoring military service. In the U.S., the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is a powerful symbol of sacrifice on behalf of the collective.

Self-sacrifice is the ultimate guarantor of trustworthiness. If a person has nothing to gain but in fact everything to lose from following a course of action, then it cannot be said that that person is acting out of self-interest. If anything can be called a sacrifice in modern times, the death of a soldier in combat is one of them. But the argument often gets over-extended. The first letter writer I quoted says his father served in World War II but died two years ago, nearly fifty years after his service. He did not die in combat yet he, and by extension the son himself, somehow become sacred and protected from criticism. There are at least two logical fallacies in the argument as well. First, those who do not die in combat are able to defend themselves from criticism. Thus, while it may be unfair to criticize those who died selflessly, the living are still fair game. Second, those who died in combat may have sacrificed themselves selflessly, but the people who sent them into combat--the president and his staff--sacrificed nothing but have much to gain.

Argument 3: Patriotism

Major premise (hidden): Owning a flag, military uniform, collection of John Phillip Sousa records, etc. guarantees that the owner of the patriotic symbol is a patriot and thus a trustworthy person.

Minor premise: I have a flag, etc.

Conclusion: I am a trustworthy person.

Analysis: It is highly problematic to claim that patriotism is a stable and known entity. It is even more problematic to claim that certain accoutrements make one patriotic. Nevertheless, nearly every car dealer profits from this logical fallacy. If patriotism means "committed citizenship," then our definition of citizenship needs to be redefined. It should include one's responsibility to the local community, the state, the nation, and the planet. Surely if I sell out my community, my state, and my planet in order to give total allegiance to the nation, I have betrayed my broader allegiances.

Argument 4: Military Credentials

Major premise: Only military credentials enable one to speak knowledgeably about war.

Minor premise: Most critics of the war in Iraq do not have military credentials.

Conclusion: Most critics of the war in Iraq cannot speak knowledgeably about war.

Analysis: The major premise might be true if the critics of the war in Iraq had limited their comments to battlefield strategies and tactics. Most critics of the war in Iraq, however, raised a host of issues related to the war, including political, moral, and ethical issues. Surely there are people who do not have military expertise who are nonetheless qualified to speak about these issues. The logical fallacy behind this argument enabled the major media outlets to rely heavily upon military generals for commentary and to ignore other speakers who could have contributed much to the public discussion of the war.

Argument 5: Academic Freedom as a Veil

Major premise: Academics (meaning only those opposed to the war) hide behind special free speech rights that allow them to speak irresponsibly.

Minor premise: Dr. Mauer is an academic.

Conclusion: Dr. Mauer hides behind special free speech rights that allow him to speak irresponsibly.

Analysis: The major premise is false. Since a number of academics throughout the country have been suspended for speaking out against the war and face threats of intimidation and reprisal, any claim about their special free speech status must be questioned. (Keefe-Feldman, 2003) The major premise also assumes that any anti-war speech is irresponsible. As I argue throughout this essay, this is not the case.

Argument 6: Academics as Spoiled Elitists

Major premise: Academics (meaning only those opposed to the war) are elitist and spoiled, and thus are not credible experts.

Minor premise: Dr. Mauer is an academic.

Conclusion: Dr. Mauer is not a credible expert.

Analysis: The unfairness of the claim in the major premise is obvious. Professors who agree with administration policy never get labeled "elitist." Rather, they get labeled "expert." It is worth pointing out that the president, vice president, most of the cabinet, most of the congress are multi-millionaires with connections to powerful business and media elites. (*The Straits Times*, 2003) By contrast, most professors are anything but millionaires and have few connections to business and media elites. Academics are by definition experts in their fields yet few are consulted in the shaping of public policy. Public policy, like the Bush-Cheney energy plan, is shaped now largely by corporate executives in secret meetings. (NRDC, 2001)

Argument 7: Criticism as a Sign of Untrustworthiness

Major premise (partially hidden): Because critics use negative language and are willing to attack others, they must be untrustworthy.

Minor premise: Opponents of the war in Iraq (or other U.S. policies) use criticism.

Conclusion: Opponents of the war in Iraq (or other U.S. policies) are untrustworthy. Conversely, supporters of U.S. policies are trustworthy.

Analysis: War is far more "negative" than criticism, which can be understood as an alternative to physical conflict. Nietzsche claims that Socrates, by inventing the dialectic, "discovered a new kind of agon, that he became its first fencing master for the noble circles of Athens." (Nietzsche, 1895) In other words, Socrates envisioned the dialectic as a form of verbal combat in which the person with the best reasoning, rather than the person with the greatest strength, carried the day. The major premise above is false because one can criticize others truthfully and still be trustworthy. If we modified the major premise to state that *false* or *unfair* attacks make the critic untrustworthy, then it would be acceptable. The minor premise would then need to be revised to reflect this change; it would state: "Opponents of the war in Iraq (or other U.S. policies) use untrue or unfair criticism." Since much of the anti-war criticism has been truthful and fair, we must reject the minor premise as well. The conclusion is false because it doesn't follow from the revised premises. The converse is false as well; many supporters of the war in Iraq used negative language and attacked others, and many did so using untrue and unfair criticism. One example: Rush Limbaugh stated, "It is beyond me how

anybody can look at these protesters and call them anything than what they are: anti-American, anti-capitalist pro-Marxists and communists." (Signorile, 2003)

A critic remains trustworthy, no matter how harsh her criticism of the government, if her criticism is true and fair. Supporters of the 2003 war against Iraq ought to agree that it would have been fair to criticize the Reagan administration in the 1980s for supporting Saddam Hussein; on Dec. 20, 1983, Current Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, then a special envoy for Reagan, visited Saddam Hussein to discuss U.S. support for Iraq in its war with Iran, after US intelligence had confirmed that Iraq was using chemical weapons "almost daily." (Borger, 2002) Pro-war advocates should accept the principle that criticism of one's government can be both truthful and fair and does not make the critic untrustworthy. Yet the intense fear of criticism within the Bush administration and their supporters makes even obvious statements of truth--like the statement that no weapons of mass destruction have yet been found in Iraq--suspect. The Bush administration's extreme paranoia about criticism has been satirized brilliantly by *The Onion* recently in their lead article, "Bush Asks Congress For \$30 Billion To Help Fight War On Criticism." (*The Onion*, 2003)

Argument 8: Anti-war Critics are Controlled only by Emotion

Major premise: Anyone who is controlled by emotions cannot be a rational person.

Minor premise: Anti-war critics are controlled by their emotions.

Conclusion: Anti-war critics cannot be rational people.

Analysis: The major premise is false because emotions can be entirely rational. Isn't it rational to feel fearful if you see an oncoming car swerve towards you? Your fear helps you respond appropriately to the situation by alerting you to move out of the way. Sometimes emotions can be inappropriate to a situation: such is the case in common phobias like fear of heights and fear of spiders. The minor premise is false because critics of the Iraq war, in general, are not *controlled* by our emotions. Rather, our emotions have been appropriate to the situation. We were outraged that the Bush administration used forged documents and numerous big lies (Rangwala and Whitaker, 2003) to get the U.S. into a war. We were afraid that the Iraq war would cause needless suffering; this fear is being borne out every day as we see lootings and shootings in Iraq, terrorist attacks in the Middle East, and political repression here and throughout the world. By contrast, we saw pro-Bush supporters express inappropriate emotional sentiments at every turn; it was inappropriate for them to fear Iraq, a defeated and impoverished nation halfway around the globe under a huge U.S. enforced no-fly zone, UN weapons inspectors roving everywhere, a degraded military, no air force or navy, no known weapons of mass destruction, no connection to the 9/11 hijackings and no proven links to al-Qaeda. It was inappropriate for pro-Bush supporters to hate anti-war protestors who had done nothing to harm the nation. It was and still is inappropriate for anybody to feel pride when soldiers kill innocent civilians for no good reason.

Pathos

In ancient times, pathos was an appeal to pity, though it has come to mean an appeal to any emotion (such as fear, pride, anger, and hatred) that moves an audience to accept an argument and to take action. Emotional appeals are often, though not always, used to sway an audience that has difficulty accepting the reasoning of an argument. Emotional appeals are deceitful when they divert attention from weaknesses in the reasoning or in the evidence for a claim, or when they prompt inappropriate responses to a situation such as arousing hatred against the less powerful.

Anti-speech advocates made several claims to arouse inappropriate emotions. Here are three of the most commonly heard ones:

1. "The majority of Americans supported the war."

While this may have been the case, certainly once the bombs started falling, it does not mean that the pro-war majority had good reasons for supporting the war. Large numbers of Americans still believe numerous falsehoods about Iraq. (Davies, 2003) This claim is a classic "bandwagon" or "join the crowd" appeal. It might feel good to be in the majority, but it does not make one right. Nor does it lead to the conclusion that anti-war critics should be silent.

2. "Everyone loves to be on the winning side."

Many anti-speech advocates now believe that because the U.S. military defeated Iraq's military, anti-war

critics should shut up because they're just sore losers who want to rain on our parade. The problem with this line of reasoning, if you could call it reasoning, is that few anti-war critics ever claimed the Iraqi military would defeat the U.S. military. Instead, anti-war critics warned of other consequences: murderous chaos in the region, increased risk of terrorism throughout the world, rising global tension as other nations implement their own "doctrines of preemption," increases in U.S. military spending at the expense of social programs, breakdown in international law, loss of U.S. allies, etc. Anti-war critics also pointed to the hypocrisy of Bush's moral claims about Iraq; to many people, Bush has shown the world that the U.S. is a rogue state with weapons of mass destruction willing to commit terrorist acts against innocent populations to achieve political aims. Pro-war advocates might realize one day how the Bush administration used the Iraq war as a distraction to ram through hugely unpopular tax cut legislation while the crises in health care, education, homelessness, joblessness, and crime worsened.

3. "America is a moral force for good in the world."

Though it is too weak and vague to be much of an argument, it appealed to Americans' sense of pride and worked very well for the Bush administration during the war. It fills the space left by earlier platitudes like "God is on our side." Because most people in the U.S. believe it so deeply, this doctrine made anybody who criticized American foreign policy seem like a crank.

Some of the most emotional appeals have come from top government leaders, such as Jay Garner, the retired American general who was in charge of the American occupation of Iraq until he was removed on May 13, and Secretary of State Colin Powell. Garner said: "We ought to be beating our chests every day. We ought to look in a mirror and be proud, and stick out our chests and suck in our bellies, and say, 'Damn, we're Americans!'" (Reuters, [2003](#)) This statement requires no comment.

Far more dangerous than Jay Garner is Colin Powell. Because he appears to have credibility and integrity to large numbers of people, Powell poses a great threat to the planet. His speech at the UN, for example, was masterfully presented, though misleading, and was effective in persuading many skeptical Americans of the administration's case against Iraq. (Richardson, [2003](#), Rangwala, [2003](#)) His mythologizing of America's purpose is very dangerous because he looks and sounds so convincing. The following dialogue consists of quotes from a February 2003 MTV interview with Colin Powell in which he tries to deflect criticism of U.S. foreign policy, followed by my analysis of his comments. My point is not to attack Powell's credibility directly but to attack the claims upon which his ethical appeals rest.

Powell: Far from being the Great Satan, I would say that we are the Great Protector. We have sent men and women from the armed forces of the United States to other parts of the world throughout the past century to put down oppression. We defeated Fascism. We defeated Communism. We saved Europe in World War I and World War II.

Mauer: Here Powell attempts to arouse pride in U.S. foreign policy. After re-examining the evidence for Powell's claims, however, we may want to temper our pride; the U.S. joined the Allies in WWII well after other allies, such as Canada, started fighting. Also, the Soviet Union did as much or more than the U.S. did to defeat fascism; the Soviet Union won the first decisive victory against the Nazis at Stalingrad at huge costs to itself well before U.S. forces won any major victories. The U.S. later played a role in the collapse of the Soviet Empire, but so did reformist movements within the Soviet Union itself. Powell should not try to grab all the credit for the U.S. when such credit is not warranted. Powell also should not claim that the U.S. "saved Europe" during World War I. Since all sides in World War I participated in destroying Europe, there were no "saviors" in that conflict. Powell's portrayal of the U.S. as world savior may justify contemporary interventions that serve business interests but little else.

Powell: And when all those conflicts were over, what did we do? Did we stay and conquer? Did we say, "Okay, we defeated Germany. Now Germany belongs to us? We defeated Japan, so Japan belongs to us?" No. What did we do? We built them up. We gave them democratic systems which they have embraced totally to their soul. And did we ask for any land? No, the only land we ever asked for was enough land to bury our dead. And that is the kind of nation we are. (Galen, [2003](#))

Mauer: Powell tries to arouse pity for the U.S. here by claiming that the U.S. sacrificed itself unselfishly for the benefit of others. In doing so, Powell disguises the more likely aims of the reconstruction of Western Europe after World War II: to spread U.S. corporate power and to prevent Communists from joining the

cabinets in Western European countries. When the Marshall Plan was beginning, Truman's Secretary of State Dean Acheson said: "These measures of relief and reconstruction have been only in part suggested by humanitarianism. Your Congress has authorized and your Government is carrying out, a policy of relief and reconstruction today chiefly as a matter of national self-interest." (Zinn, 1980) Powell also skipped over the last 60 years of U.S. foreign policy in which the U.S. toppled several foreign governments, many of them democratic (like the governments in Iran, Chile and Guatemala), in order to impose pro-business regimes that tortured and murdered their own people. (Pulcifer, 2002) Historian Howard Zinn states: "Given the disastrous intervention of the United States everywhere since World War II (Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Chile, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Grenada, Panama, the Congo, Somalia, Iraq) and before World War II in the Caribbean and the Pacific . . . we would be right to be skeptical of any military intervention by the United States, no matter how strongly our leaders claim it is on behalf of human rights." (Zinn, 1999) Even the Washington Times, hardly an anti-war paper, has shown in detail how the U.S. helped Saddam Hussein achieve power through a series of bloody coups. (Sale, 2003)

Conclusion

Because the U.S. may be on a slippery slope towards further unjust wars abroad and further antidemocratic actions at home, it is surely a practical and moral consideration for us to express dissent now before we get into the next war. It becomes more difficult to express dissent once we have begun another war and lost more free speech rights.

Those who control the channels of discourse--the owners and managers of newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and public events forums--behave contrary to the principles of free speech when they prevent legitimate criticism of the Bush administration from appearing. (Rendall, 2003) Furthermore, by permitting the Bush administration's malicious and dangerous speech to pass through their discourse channels without analysis or rebuttal, those who control the media endanger us all. (Hans, 2003)

Speech is both a function of power and a form of power. Think about any situation in which you have been under the power of someone else: your parents, your boss, or a superior officer. The person with power has free speech, right? In these contexts, you have to struggle for the right to speech. It is not fair, but it is the way things work. Free speech is not really free. It is not an abstract thing. Not only is free speech not free, but if what you say offends people in power, you can not even buy it. (Rampton and Stauber, 2003, UnbrandAmerica, 2003) Free speech occurs within a set of material conditions only when people exercise it. To have the power of speech, a person must struggle to gain access to the channels of discourse.

Free speech is won when people assert their right to it and maintain that right. Others can defend your free speech, but they can do so only if you first assert it.

So who is entitled to free speech? Is it only the province of those in power? No. Free speech is acquired by those who struggle for it.

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