polemical speech and the struggle for recognition
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The practice of argumentation is often driven by social goals. Among these are goals I call 'polemical'.[1] Argumentation is 'polemical' when it aims to contest the level of *credibility* a speaker enjoys as a contributor to discourse. 'Polemical' disagreement differs from 'deliberative' disagreement insofar as the former concerns not merely the validity of what speakers say but also the standing of speakers as participants in the field of communication. The aim of this programmatic essay is to outline the basic features of polemical speech and to examine how polemical speech is used in struggles for recognition.

Because polemical speech is defined in terms of challenges to the level of credibility a speaker enjoys, we shall first consider what is meant by credibility and why credibility matters (I). We will then be in a position to consider the phenomenon of polemical speech itself and its connection to conflicts over validity (II). In the central sections of the article, I aim to defend the claim that struggles to challenge or establish standing as a credible speaker can (and should) be routed through argumentation over the validity of claims. The basic reason for this is that the demonstration of credibility is normatively achieved through the speaker's satisfactory performance in justifying the validity of what they say. But our socially mediated practices of justification and self-assurance regarding validity complicate the picture, and these complexities are explored in sections III and IV. In the final section of the article, I briefly consider whether polemical argumentation is

compatible with the ideals of civility and social solidarity that are often thought to be basic to the spirit of democracy (V).

I. CREDIBILITY AND WHY IT MATTERS

Credibility is a status or standing that individuals have in the eyes of their inter-locutors, a status they enjoy in virtue of others' regard for them. Specifically, it is the standing enjoyed by speakers who are recognized to be *reliable communicators of truth*, or more generally, *of what is rationally justifiable*. A credible witness recalls well what they have witnessed and communicates it honestly. A credible scientist is methodologically rigorous in their search for knowledge and is diligent and precise in communicating their scientific understanding. The attribution of cred-ibility does not make a speaker credible; we expect the attribution to track what is true of the speaker independently of its being recognized. Credibility rests upon two independent bases: *sincerity* and *competence*. To be credible, a speaker must be sincere, that is, must be a speaker who can be trusted not to speak falsehoods knowingly or to deceive intentionally.[2] However, one can be a sincere communi-cator without being competent (and vice versa). To warrant recognition as a cred-ible speaker, therefore, one must not only be sincere but must also be a reliable source of truth or, more generally, of what is rationally justifiable. Reliability of this kind, in turn, rests upon *rational* and *communicative* competences. That is to say, it rests on the fact that (i) the speaker possesses the *capacities* required to ac-quire knowledge and to form sound judgments, and (ii) the speaker *utilizes* these capacities with sufficient consistency and responsibility to be able to guarantee that what they communicate to others is worthy of belief; and (iii) the speaker possesses the *capacities* required to communicate their knowledge and judgment to others, and (iv) the speaker utilizes these capacities responsibly in the sense that they assert only what is worthy of belief and do so in appropriate situations.[3] It should also be noted that credibility comes in degrees and comes indexed to topic areas and rational capabilities. Thus, Joe might be credible as a judge of the quality of scientific papers but lack credibility as a judge of which tennis players are likely to win Wimbledon. Jill might be scrupulously honest in her business dealings, but prone to lying and deception when playing board games with her children.

Credibility plays a vital role in communication. This is because when a speaker is regarded to be credible this translates into the readiness of hearers to take what that speaker says *on trust*. However, readiness to believe on the basis of a speaker's

credibility is not blind trust. It does not receive what is said with indifference to whether or not what is said is rationally defensible. Rather, readiness to believe on the basis of a speaker's credibility amounts to the presumption on the part of the hearer that what is said is indeed rationally defensible *because* the speaker who has undertaken to assert it is credible. It is assumed that the speaker would be able to back up what is said with appropriate justifications if they were required to do so.[4] Because the credible speaker is presumed to be able to provide the reasons why their claim is rationally acceptable if required, what is said by the speaker can be relied upon by the hearer *without* the need for rigorous critical testing or independent validation. The fact of a speaker's credibility, therefore, allows the hearer to acquire rationally defensible beliefs cheaply, i.e. without expending the effort associated with having to assess the evidence or justifications for the claim themselves.[5]

But credibility is a valuable commodity not just for epistemic purposes. It is also valuable for moral and political reasons. It matters to us profoundly that we are regarded by others as having the ability to speak truthfully and that we are trusted by others to do so in our social interactions with them. Indeed, it has been argued that the systematic denial of this basic form of recognition would represent an intolerable condition of invisibility,[6] and even that such a state would constitute a violation of basic justice.[7] In a similar vein, a number of prominent contemporary philosophers have argued that respect for speakers as contributors to discourse is required of us as a component of our moral duty to respect persons, and/or is required of us in order to realise the political value of democratic inclusion.[8] However, it should be noted that our social interactions are never quite so simple. Our epistemic responsibilities frequently call upon us to form judgments of credibility, and judgments of credibility are evaluative. They must be tuned to the level of trust a given speaker on a given topic deserves to be shown. Sometimes trust and credulity is warranted, but sometimes it is not, and we are justified in taking up an attitude of distrust, suspicion, or scepticism toward a speaker. In other words, readiness to believe the communications of others cannot simply be determined in advance by our moral commitment to show respect for persons or our political commitments to discursive inclusion. Thus, it cannot be a demand of justice that we treat as credible a speaker who lacks credibility and vice versa. On the contrary, we feel it to be a matter of justice that speakers are regarded as credible *in proportion to* the level of trust and credulity that is warranted in the situation. Therefore, we must juggle our obligations to show respect, toleration, and inclusion on the one hand with our obligations as epistemic agents to evaluate and ac-

cept claims on the basis of rational justifiability on the other. From a theoretical point of view (if not from a practical point of view), we can resolve this tension by observing that to be recognized as a credible source of knowledge and opinion is a form of 'social esteem' and not a form of 'moral respect'.[9] To be recognized in this way is to be valued according to one's abilities as a contributor to the lives of others, not (say) respected for one's incomparable worth as a human being.

Speakers who are regarded as highly credible and who have the means to communicate their views to large numbers of people can be said to enjoy influence. Influence in this sense occurs when a speaker makes use of her credibility in the eyes of hearers to cause her hearers to believe p by asserting p and relying on the fact that her hearers will readily take p to be true *on trust* when she asserts it. But in ordinary speech we would typically only call someone 'influential' if they have a social position that allows them to influence a significant number of people. When we call someone 'influential' in such cases, we intuitively recognize that being treated with credulity by many people gives an agent *power* of a certain kind.[10] And it is because credibility can translate into (a form of) power that disputes over credibility are often a central focus in *political* debate. Indeed, the political sphere is the paradigmatic context in which language is used 'polemically.' (But, for reasons we shall discuss, it should be noted that *polemical* speech is not synonymous with *political* discourse. Every domain of discourse and every situation of social interaction can become polemical if a disagreement emerges over the level of credibility attributed to participants in discourse. In this regard, scientific discourse can be as 'polemical' as political discourse.)

Because of the epistemic, moral, and political significance of trust and credibility in communication, significant consequences can follow when judgments of credibility go wrong. If we treat a speaker lacking credibility as though they were credible, we are liable to believe their assertions uncritically when they should be received with scepticism. As a result, we can acquire false beliefs (or true beliefs but with an unjustified level of confidence in their truth). Conversely, if we treat a credible speaker as though they lacked credibility, we are liable to dismiss their assertions or treat them with profound scepticism when what they say should be taken on faith, or at least taken seriously. As a result, we can fail to gain from what that speaker has to teach us. Mis-judgments about credibility have social and political consequences as well. Unwarranted trust can make individuals influential who do not deserve to be influential; conversely, unwarranted suspicion can rob influence from those whose competence and integrity justifies their having influ-

ence. Moreover, as mentioned above, individuals who are unjustifiably distrusted and treated with suspicion suffer a form of mis-recognition that threatens their self-consciousness at a quite radical level. This is a point to which we shall return below.

II. THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION AND CONFLICTS OVER VALIDITY

When assessments of a speaker's competence or credibility are held in common by interlocutors, no conflict occurs at the level of how that speaker is treated as a participant in the field of discourse. What's more, communication is entirely possible in cases where participants in a discourse have come to view one another as *unequal* in terms of their rational capacities. For instance, if *A* is willing to accept his dependency upon the superior knowledge or rational insight of *B*, then a cooperative relationship between them can be established on that basis. What results might be something like a teacher-student relationship. However, it is possible that one or both parties will resist that outcome, if, for instance, *A* is unwilling to assume the role of student in relation to *B*. In that case, the disagreement will be experienced not merely as a disagreement over some subject matter but as a disagreement over the standing and relationship of the parties as speakers. Such conflicts are failures of mutual recognition in a strict sense.

Disagreements over credibility of speakers are a common feature of social life. We are routinely confronted with speakers who are regarded by others to be sincere, knowledgeable, morally insightful, or prudent, but whom we judge to be dishonest and/or unreliable—even deeply misguided—in one or more of these regards; and, conversely, we are confronted with speakers who are regarded by others to be deceptive, ignorant, morally misguided, or foolish, but whom we judge to be sincere and/or reliable in one or more of these regards. In these situations, we find ourselves in disagreements with others not merely over the validity of *claims*, but also over the level of *credibility* that speakers claim for themselves or that hearers attribute to them.

When we disagree over the validity of claims, these disagreements can be processed through argumentation between speakers who seek to critically test claims and to convince one another on the basis of reasons of what to believe. This is what I call the 'deliberative' mode of argumentation. The goal of deliberative argumentation is to establish "convincing *positions* to which all individuals can agree without coercion."[11] In this mode of discourse, the standing of speakers is

not problematized. By contrast, I call 'polemical' that mode of argumentation in which there is disagreement over the level of credibility attributed to speakers and this is explicitly or implicitly the focus of the dispute. Polemical discourse fulfills a function *orthogonal* to the achievement of mutual agreement regarding the validity of claims: namely, the function of negotiating the standing of contributors to discourse, and thus determining how much weight their contributions to discourse will be given.

However, there is a deep interconnection between struggles over validity and struggles over recognition. Polemical conflicts over *credibility* are not disconnected from the question of whether particular *claims* are rationally defensible. On the contrary, arguing with the goal of showing the justifiability of one's view or the unjustifiability of an opponent's view on some matter is an important way in which individuals seek to demonstrate their credibility as speakers or the lack of credibility of their opponents. When this occurs, the discussion of what is true or right becomes *subservient* to resolving the conflict over the standing of the parties—over whether they are seen as respected and valued contributors to discourse and/or as rational agents in general. The jostling for standing between the opponents is *mediated* by the competition for the better argument.

The interconnection between struggles for recognition and practices of critical argumentation is seen most clearly not in political discourse but in theoretical discourse. To develop this point, we turn to the late work of Pierre Bourdieu.[12] In texts such as *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu not only shows that he is cognizant of the two levels of conflict at play within the pragmatics of argumentation—i.e. the conflict over validity and the conflict over the standing of speakers—he also makes this feature of the speech situation central to his account of scientific discourse. In these late works, Bourdieu continues to insist, as he had in his earlier works, that all social worlds, including fields of 'disinterested' inquiry such as the field of science, are microcosms containing "concentrations of power and capital, monopolies, power relations, selfish interests, conflicts, etc."[13] However, according to Bourdieu, it is nonetheless a striking feature of the field of scientific discourse in particular that the self-interest participants have in achieving esteem—and even dominance and power—is tied to the imperative to produce arguments that are rationally defensible to critics. One has to produce what counts as 'good science' by the lights of other scientists in order to make one's way up the hierarchical social ordering in the field:

The scientific field is a game in which you have to arm yourself with reason in order to win. Without producing or requiring supermen inspired by motivations radically different from those of ordinary people, it produces and encourages, by its own logic, and outside any normative imposition, particular forms of communication, such as competitive discussion, critical dialogue and so on, which tend in fact to favour the accumulation and control of knowledge.[14]

The collective pursuit of truth within the scientific field, on this model, does not require participants to transcend their particular interests; insofar as it is organised as a competition that rewards those who win 'the competition for the better argument,' it feeds off those interests. In the scientific field at least, competition is *channelled* in a remarkable way, such that participants are "obliged to sublimated their *libido dominandi* into a *libido sciendi* that can only triumph by answering a demonstration with a refutation, one scientific fact with another scientific fact."[15] The competitive and conflictual social dynamic of the field is not vicious but virtuous to this extent, since the egoistic pursuit of success is aligned with the collective goal of the pursuit of knowledge.[16]

Bourdieu is not alone in thematising the competitive dimension of discourse. Even deliberative theorists such as Habermas acknowledge the 'competitive' and 'conflictual' character of practices of argumentation.[17] But Bourdieu's model ties the struggle for recognition to the competition for the better argument in a more explicit and convincing fashion than Habermas does. And, in so doing, he enables us to see clearly how the impetus to assert justifiable claims and to justify them can be connected to the polemical goals of speakers. However, to understand the logic of polemical disagreement we need to go beyond Bourdieu's analysis in certain respects.

III. THE DESIRE FOR RECOGNITION AND SELF-JUSTIFICATION

Bourdieu's analysis locates the conditions leading to a struggle for prestige and influence within the structure of *social fields*, e.g. the economic field, the scientific field, and the artistic field. He claims that 'symbolic capital' emerges as a 'scarce resource' and hence as an object of competition when it is invested with value *within* a social field. Participants must make the 'investment' in the stakes of the game before the struggle for recognition native to that game makes sense and takes hold of them. The scientific field thus *produces* conflict by inducing partici-

pants to invest themselves in the stakes of the game and in the competitive pursuit of esteem within it. Furthermore, following Lyotard, Bourdieu assumes that there is an incommensurabilty between social fields and language games. Hence the ambition of the scientist towards discovery makes no sense and has no value from the point of view of the economist, and vice versa, since the scientist and the economist have bought into different communities of value and situate themselves within different social fields. The only commonality across these fields is that in each case the struggle for recognition is not at all a struggle to attain equality but a struggle for power and dominance. On this basis, Bourdieu is convinced that we should see the "rationalized" form of competition for social dominance that is observed within the field of science as an exception rather than the rule. It is only as a result of peculiar and unlikely conditions that a form of life has emerged in which the strategies seen to be *legitimate* in the struggle for recognition are tied to the production of *reason* and *universality*.

However, there are reasons to doubt that struggles for recognition take place in a "rationalized" form only within the scientific field. Already in the 1930's Karl Mannheim observed that political actors pursued political goals through attacks on the worldviews of opponents, a phenomenon that he described (in terms reminiscent of Bourdieu) as "a rationalized form of the struggle for social predominance."[18] But, in fact, we could multiply examples across practically every domain of social interaction. In our personal lives, our professional lives, as well as our public-political lives, we hold one another to account and require rational justifications for beliefs and actions. Indeed, in every domain of modern life, we rely increasingly upon the results of reflective reason rather than the authority of received cultural understandings to provide the basis for our social coordination.

There is a basic reason why a concern for validity (and hence seriousness about conflicts over validity) cannot be relegated to the domain of scientific discourse and why it matters in every domain of life. The reason is this: as agents, we take ourselves to have *purchase* on the world, to have a reasonably secure ability to make sense of the world and to navigate our way through it. There is, as far as we are concerned, a *validity basis* to our world-relation. That is to say, we orient ourselves in the world according to beliefs we take to be true, and on the basis of evaluations we take to reflect what is right or good. Even in contexts where we are oriented exclusively in terms of prudential considerations, these too rest upon assumptions of validity, i.e. regarding the instrumental rationality of our actions as effective and efficient means to achieve given ends. Hence, our practical agency

is deeply entwined with our beliefs, and our beliefs are subject to rational evaluation.

Because this is the case, as rational agents we are vulnerable to criticism in a particular fashion. If the validity of our beliefs is questioned, the basis of our world-relation is placed in question. The self-certainty of our purchase on the world, our confidence that we can make sense of the world and navigate our way through it, is threatened. Conversely, the affirmation of the validity of our beliefs given by others can serve to reaffirm and solidify our self-certainty as agents. Either way, the recognition by others of the validity of our beliefs conditions our self-relation as rational beings, and our need to reassure ourselves of the truth and rightness of our world-, self-, and other-relations therefore characteristically takes a socially mediated route.

Gerald Postema illustrates how this process occurs in the case of our self-consciousness as moral agents. To begin with, the desire for self-assurance as moral agents implies a concern for *self-justification* before others:

> It is a matter of asserting and defending the claims one makes, in one's own behalf, on the behaviour and attitudes of others, and defending the legitimacy of one's own actions as they impinge upon and constrain others. To assert one's moral standing is to assert the legitimacy of these claims.[19]

But we desire that this *assertion* of legitimacy would rest on a genuinely sound basis, otherwise our self-assurance would be hollow and unsatisfying. A sound basis means a basis that, because it is genuinely valid, stands up to scrutiny and is recognized by other rational agents as valid:

> Justification of the claims I make on your behaviour is not a matter of showing you reasons *you have* for acting in ways which in fact are beneficial to me. They essentially involve *self-justification*. Self-justification depends on one's ability to see one's own actions and claims as justified through the eyes of others. If I am to regard my actions or claims as legitimate, I must be able to do so in terms of reasons both I and others can recognize as relevant and persuasive. This entails that I attempt to offer reasons which are neither reasons (just) for you nor (just) for me, but reasons which (I sincerely believe) are reasons *for us*, that is, *public reasons*.[20]

Thus, Postema concludes that public argumentation, argumentation in search of reasons that are generally and reciprocally acceptable to a community of moral agents, is the only adequate source of rational self-assurance.[21]

If something like this picture is correct, then the validity of our views as judged by intersubjective standards of rational acceptability matters to us quite independently of our struggle to achieve prestige or dominance within a given social field. Having the validity of our views acknowledged by others serves to affirm our world-relation, our relation to others, and our relation to ourselves. By the same token, when our pre-reflective assumptions about what is true and right are placed in question by others, the validity basis of our relation to the world, others, and ourselves is unsettled. Our 'purchase' on the world is threatened, and the self-certainty of our lives and our self-understanding as agents is disrupted. In these situations, we are motivated to respond to challenges to the validity of our beliefs and convictions in order to reassure ourselves of our grasp on reality—or, failing that, to reconstruct new beliefs and convictions out of the ruins. What gives us an imperative to justify ourselves and to entangle ourselves in argumentation with others, including in polemical disagreements, is not a shared acceptance of the rules of a language game as such (contra Bourdieu) but the socially mediated character of our world-, self- and other-relation in general.

From this vantage point we can begin to perceive why the stakes of *polemical* disagreements are so high. When an opponent regards my beliefs, values, and practical commitments to be so wide of the mark that they treat me as though I were fundamental *disoriented* in the space of reasons, this presents a profound threat *both* to my social standing as a credible partner in discourse *and* to the self-certainty that I have concerning my purchase on the world. The social standing that I enjoy is at stake, as, in a sense, is my assurance about the value of my identity, my projects, and my commitments. Hence, it is when a disagreement becomes 'polemical' that we find ourselves the most unsettled with respect to our identity, the most threatened with respect to our sense of social solidarity and cultural belonging. The affirmation and reassurance provided by communities of likeminded individuals (e.g. faith communities, political parties) can provide a psychologically important buffer against such challenges. But ultimately, challenges to the validity of beliefs remain unresolved at both a social and an intellectual level until they are confronted discursively and reflectively.

IV. THE DIALECTICAL LOGIC OF POLEMICAL DISAGREEMENT

I have suggested that we need to distinguish between 'deliberative' and 'polemical' disagreements. However, deliberative exchanges can easily become polemical, and many deliberative exchanges will have a polemical dimension (or subtext), even if it remains relatively superficial and unobtrusive. To illustrate this point, imagine a typical argumentative exchange in the course of a public meeting. After a presentation, an audience members rises to question a claim made by the speaker. If the audience member asserts that a claim made by the speaker is false, then the credibility of that speaker is placed in question. By presuming to contradict the publicly asserted view of the speaker, the audience member places in question whether the speaker has been *responsible* in asserting the claim as worthy of belief, and this is a challenge not just to what the speaker has said but to the action of the speaker has performed by saying it. If the speaker is able to justify her claim, then she also justifies her performance as a speaker; her credibility remains intact (maybe it is even enhanced). And, if so, the audience member who had falsely charged the speaker with making an erroneous claim is now forced to justify himself if he wishes to protect his own standing as a credible participant in discourse. This illustrates just how easy it is for a polemical dimension to open up within an argumentative exchange. It is enough that there is a public *assertion* of two mutually incompatible claims to place the interlocutors in a position where their credibility is in question. The dispute is then such that each participant is at risk of *winning* or *losing* twice over in the exchange—not just winning or losing the argument, but also winning or losing in the struggle for recognition as a trustworthy and valuable source of knowledge and opinion. This is why public debates—even academic seminars—can have an air of competition and risk to them.

It should be acknowledged, however, that parties can take steps to neutralize the threat to their standing. They can do so by reassuring each other of their respect and esteem, or by explicitly ring-fencing the dispute so that they focus solely on the substance of the claims made. Another (complementary) strategy is for parties to seek reassurance from each other that their disagreement is a 'reasonable' difference of opinion (e.g. in light of the 'burdens of judgment'). If so, they can maintain a mutual regard for each other as 'credible' (or 'reasonable') despite their differences of opinion. But, as we have noted, we often find ourselves in situations in which we or other parties are convinced of the rational acceptability of some claim despite its being contested, or convinced of the rational unacceptability of their opponent's claim despite its being asserted. In these cases, a speaker's

credibility can suffer damage or enhancement as the argument proceeds.

The example above also illustrates how the desire for self-justification can be a powerful driver of argumentative practice. Both the speaker and the questioner are motivated to *persist* in the argument by the desire to justify themselves. Not only that, the desire for self-justification incentivise them to produce arguments that will convince their audience that they are in the right, and incentivises them to retreat from indefensible positions in order to preserve their credibility (if they find themselves unable to mount a credible justification for their views). However, we must pause to consider some complexities here which reveal the dialectical nature of polemical disagreement.

As I have argued, self-justification requires the intersubjective recognition of the validity of our standpoint. However, the recognition that reassures is the recognition given by those whose judgment we regard to be rational and hence authoritative. This, of course, is another way of restating Hegel's famous insight into the internal relationship between mutual recognition and independent self-consciousness: it is only when I receive the recognition of my rationality by another whom I recognise as rational that the recognition of the other counts for me as a genuine affirmation on which I can rely, and in which I can be 'with myself in the other'. For this reason, the achievement of hegemonic power or public prestige is not sufficient to resolve doubts or questions regarding one's self-consciousness as a rational agent. For instance, suppose certain beliefs of mine are supported by respected moral figures or scientific experts. It is always open to an opponent to question the authority (i.e. credibility) of these supposed experts and in so doing to undercut the reassurance that I might have gained from having *these* agents validate the rationality of my beliefs.

This points to the fact that the status of one's own self-relationship as a rational agent rests as much upon maintaining a convincing mapping of the field of communicative agents (of who is credible and who is not) as it does on convincing procedures of rational justification as such. When the whole network of one's judgments about validity and credibility is challenged, the challenge can be resolved in a satisfactory way only through a pincer movement that, at one and the same time, demonstrates the validity of one's standpoint *and* demonstrates the rationality of those who recognise the validity of one's standpoint and the irrationality of those who do not. Polemical speech is the performance of reasoning that seeks to accomplish this feat.[22]

V. EXCURSUS: IS POLEMICAL SPEECH COMPATIBLE WITH THE VALUES OF DEMOCRACY?

What I called 'deliberation' above has been a major topic of interest for political theorists over the past two decades or more, and it holds a central place in theories of deliberative democracy. By contrast, the phenomenon of polemical disagreement has been largely passed over. It is not difficult to see why. When we judge a speaker to have less credibility than others attribute to them, what we hope to achieve through polemical speech is not merely the *discrediting* of their views but their *marginalization* as sources of knowledge and judgment in the field of discourse. However, from the vantage point of deliberative theory, norms of inclusion and equality of participation are thought to be basic conditions for the legitimacy or validity of discursive or deliberative procedures.[23] Similarly, from the vantage point of democratic theory, such marginalizing forms of social behaviour appear to be antithetical to the spirit of democracy which is predicated on the respect for each citizen's right to participate in public affairs and to have a voice in the processes and procedures of government. For these and other reasons, we find political philosophers such as John Rawls asserting that, as far as possible, political discourse should be conducted in a way that maintains good faith and solidarity between citizens despite their disagreements with each other:

> We should not readily accuse one another of self- or group-interest, prejudice or bias, and of such deeply entrenched errors as ideological blindness and delusion. Such accusations arouse resentment and hostility, and block the way to reasonable agreement. The disposition to make such accusations without compelling grounds is plainly unreasonable, and often a declaration of intellectual war.[24]

No doubt there are good reasons to worry about the costs that polemical attacks impose on individuals and on social relationships. As mentioned above, polemical attacks can present a profound threat to an individual's standing as a credible partner in discourse and to their self-certainty with regard to their purchase on the world. For this reason, Karl Mannheim plausibly describes polemical attacks as a "fundamental attack on the whole life-situation of the opponent" that undermines the opponent's basic "self-confidence."[25] (The prevalence of polemical speech in public life accounts for the perception that it politics is an unpleasant and bruising business.[26]) What's more, there is no question that a great many polemical attacks are motivated by fear, prejudice, and self-interest. Far from be-

ing a practice of rational accountability, polemical attacks frequently embody an irrational response to threats posed by others who challenge the beliefs and assumptions that underwrite our lives.

However, polemical speech also plays a vital role in the life of democratic societies and especially in struggles for justice. As James Johnson remarks in response to Rawls's 'precepts of reasonable discussion':

> ... political actors may, in fact, be driven by self-interest, blinded by prejudice, or deluded by ideology. It very plausibly is among the desirable features of democratic deliberation that it allows participants to raise this possibility, to challenge those to whom the charge in fact applies, and to do so publicly.[27]

Participants in the public-political sphere must be able to avail themselves of the resources of critique to oppose those who use 'deliberative' speech for strategic ends, or who distort 'deliberation' by promulgating biased or ideological points of view, even if it means breaking with the spirit of mutual respect and cooperation that is the hallmark of the 'deliberative stance.' For individuals who are oriented by a commitment to justice, it is an act of democratic responsibility to challenge the credibility that self-interested, prejudiced or deluded actors enjoy in the eyes of others. This is the appropriate *discursive* means at their disposal to oppose the social forces of falsehood and injustice.[28]

Is it possible, then, for norms of civility and politeness to be exercised even as speakers argue with an intention of pursuing polemical goals? As mentioned above, in principle there is no reason to think that these two attitudes cannot be expressed simultaneously. The pursuit of polemical goals need not be at the expense of a commitment to show respect and courtesy to those with whom we disagree and whom we take to lack credibility; nor need they amount to a rejection of the ideals of toleration and pluralism. However, it is undeniable that social esteem matters to us just as moral respect does. It can be a painful experience to be judged to be less competent that one takes oneself to be, even if the criticism is expressed with gentleness and respect. In practice, therefore, we experience in polemical discourse a tension between the desire for social solidarity on the one hand and the recognition that conscientiously exercising our epistemic judgment can lead to social strain and conflict. Unfortunately, this follows inevitably from the fact that as communicative agents we are engaged not only in the business of

evaluating and sorting claims and arguments but also in the business of evaluating and sorting communicative agents in terms of their credibility and trustworthiness as contributors of valid knowledge, moral insight, prudent advice, and so forth. The demands of justice appear to require *both* that we show respect to rationally autonomous beings *and* that we exercise responsibility and judiciousness in showing appropriate regard to agents in respect of their credibility as speakers.

The political ideals of toleration and the social virtues of politeness and civility have given us tools to moderate polemical disagreements and to mitigate the social disruption they can cause. But the polemical use of language thematised in this paper—the public use of language to process disagreements concerning the standing of agents as participants in the field of discourse via a contestation of validity claims—remains a perennial feature of political discourse and, in fact, of discourse in general. The spectacle that results may not fulfil the expectations of respectful dialogue set by deliberative democrats, but neither does it represent an irrational clash of social forces, since the polemical use of language ties a contestation of power to a demonstration of rationality.

VI. CONCLUSION

The account I have offered of the structure of the theoretical and practical self-relation and of the socially mediated route that we take in order to reassure ourselves of the truth and rightness of our world-, self-, and other-relations is broadly compatible with a range of contemporary neo-Hegelian theories of recognition.[29] Where it differs, and offers something new, is in showing (at least in outline) how the struggle for recognition *between agents* cannot be understood apart from the struggle for recognition *of validity*, and vice versa. According to this view, struggles for recognition and practices of rational argumentation are more intimately connected than either recognition theorists or deliberative democrats have acknowledged.

The lack of mutual recognition in these speech situations may complicate 'deliberation,' but it does not disable argumentation. On the contrary, it establishes the very tensions and dissatisfactions that drive agents towards critical engagement using the resources of rational argumentation. This is a potentially explosive conclusion since it places in question the common assumption of deliberative democrats that the 'rationalising' potential of speech is only properly released and harnessed in carefully orchestrated deliberative settings involving partici-

pants who possess the right dispositions, such as respect, openness, critical self-reflectiveness, and cooperativeness. Against this view, the analysis above leads us to expect rigorous and productive critical work to occur not only in deliberative forums but also in the 'wild communication' (Habermas) and 'unruly practices' (Fraser) of the public sphere. If this is correct, then it signals both an expansion of the horizons of deliberative theory and a significant shift in our very conception of deliberative politics.

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NOTES

1. Polemical speech can be likened to what Douglas Walton calls "eristic" dialogue in his well-known classification of dialogue types. Douglas defines "eristic" dialogue as taking place in a situation of interpersonal conflict, in which the goal of participants is to attack opponents. As a whole the dialogue type has the purpose of revealing deep conflicts. See Douglas Walton, *Fundamentals of Critical Argumentation*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 183. However, Douglas does not develop a detailed analysis of the pragmatics of eristic dialogue, nor does he explore its relation to the goals of rational argumentation as such.

2. The attribute of sincerity in the context of speech is closely connected with the disposition of good will or benevolence, which is widely thought to be a condition required for trustworthiness in general.

3. An account of the act of 'telling' along these lines is developed and defended by Richard Moran in his essay "Getting Told and Being Believed", *Philosophers' Imprint* 5 (2005): 1–29.

4. Jürgen Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, trans. Barbara Fultner, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998, 136 and 316-317.

5. For a more fully developed account of the pragmatics of trust and credibility in speech, see Moran, "Getting Told and Being Believed."

6. Axel Honneth, *Unsichtbarkeit: Stationen einer Theorie der Intersubjektivität*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003.

7. Rainer Forst, "First Things First: Redistribution, Recognition and Justification," *European Journal of Political Theory* 6(3) (2007): 291–304.

8. For a discussion of various attempts to develop moral and political arguments along these lines, see Thomas Besch, "On Discursive Respect," *Social Theory and Practice* 40(2) (2014): 207–231.

9. On the distinction between moral respect and social esteem, see Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995, 92-130.

10. In my view, 'influence' is a unique and frequently overlooked form of power. But I am not able to pursue a discussion of influence and its relation to other forms of power here.

11. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. W. Rehg, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996, 103. Emphasis added.

12. The present appropriation of Bourdieu, focusing as it does on the late Bourdieu's (qualified) defense of reason and universalism, takes a rather different approach than existing Bourdieu-inspired critiques of Habermas. Cf. Margaret Kohn, "Language, Power, and Persuasion: Toward a Critique of Deliberative Democracy," *Constellations* 7(3) (2000): 408–429; Keith Topper, "Not So Trifling Nuances: Pierre Bourdieu, Symbolic Violence, and the Perversions of Democracy," *Constellations* 8(1) (2001): 30–56; Clarrisa Rile Hayward, "Doxa and Deliberation," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 7(1) (2004): 1–24; Kevin Olson, "Legitimate Speech and Hegemonic Idiom: The Limits of Deliberative Democracy in the Diversity of its Voices," *Political Studies* 59(3) (2011): 527–546.

13. Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000, 109.

14. Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990, 32.

15. Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 111.

16. For this reason, Bourdieu does not see a contradiction between the Foucauldian perspective

which regards discourse as a regime of subjectivation that reproduces relations of power and domination, and the Habermasian perspective which regards discourse as a procedure that generates a rationally justified intersubjective recognition of validity. These two processes are mediated in and through the social practice of scientific inquiry. It could be argued that Bourdieu's account does not adequately address the fundamental Foucauldian challenge, namely that while it is true that the production of 'truth' is always subject to the dialectical constraints of 'rational' discourse, what counts as 'rational' is an effect of power. On this view, power and truth are thus two sides of a coin. Indeed, as with Habermas, it is contentious whether Bourdieu's analysis of the imperatives of universalization is sufficient to respond to this point. This is an important objection, but not one that I am able to address adequately within the scope of this paper.

17. Habermas describes argumentation or discourse as "a search for truth organized in the form of a *competition*." (Jürgen Habermas, "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification" in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990, 87.) The competition for the better argument, as Habermas understands it, plays out through a "ritualized" exchange between speakers who present arguments and counter-arguments, pose and respond to objections, request and provide evidence, meet burdens of proof, and so forth. (Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1984, 26.)

18. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991, 34. This passage was brought to my attention by James Johnson's essay, "Arguing for Deliberation: Some Skeptical Considerations," in *Deliberative Democracy*, ed. Jon Elster, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 161–84, at 165.

19. Gerald Postema, "Public Practical Reason: An Archeology," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 12(1) (1995):43–86, 84.

20. Ibid., 85.

21. See Jürgen Habermas, "Individuation through Socialization: On George Herbert Mead's Theory of Subjectivity," in *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992, 149–204.

22. Admittedly, the discussion of polemical speech offered here remains at a formal level. A more detailed discussion of the pragmatics of polemic speech is offered in Matheson Russell and Andrew Montin, "The Rationality of Political Disagreement: Rancière's Critique of Habermas," *Constellations* 22(4) (2015): 543–54.

23. The idealizing conditions are theoretically specified, for instance, by Habermas's discourse ethics. See Habermas, "Discourse Ethics," 43–115.

24. John Rawls, "The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus," *New York University Law Review* 64(2) (1989): 238.

25. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 34f.

26. It perhaps also worth noting that polemical speech does not always have a negative character. When we judge a speaker to have *more* credibility than they are taken by others to have, what we aim for in polemical speech is the *vindication* of their views and for them to be *attended to* and *trusted* as sources of knowledge and judgment. Polemical speech thus has a 'positive' mode in which speakers seek to promote trust in credible voices as well as a 'negative' mode in which speakers seek to promote distrust in voices lacking credibility.

27. Johnson, "Arguing for Deliberation," 166.

28. A similar insight is explored in Iris Marion Young's analysis of the speaker's shift from "deliberative persuasion" to "activist agitation" in her essay "Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democ-

racy," *Political Theory* 29(5) (2001): 670–90.
29. I have in mind a range of recent theorists including Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth, Robert Pippin, and Jürgen Habermas.