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Abstract:

How do fear appeals generate persuasive force, or reasonably pressure addressees to act as the speaker advocates? Leading models of fear appeals provide partial answers to this question because they locate persuasive force primarily in internal states, such as addressees' cognitions or emotions. Consequently, they omit key parts of rhetorical transactions such as the speaker, actual message design, and bilateral communication vectors. The normative pragmatic model proposed here provides a more complete account by describing persuasive force in terms of strategies speakers use to design fear appeals. Put simply, fear appeals are designed to (1) make manifest that the speaker has made a responsible assessment of potential fearful outcomes and how to address them; and (2) forestall criticism for poor judgment or fear-mongering. Persuasive force (1) is generated by message design features such as claiming that harmful consequences will occur unless addressees act as the speaker advocates, presenting grounds, and using intense language; and (2) is located in risks and commitments that these design features make manifest.

Text of paper:

Broadly speaking, it seems plausible to say that fear appeals are designed to induce action—to generate persuasive force for addressees to act in order to avoid a fearful outcome (Walton 2000, 1-2, 20, 22, 143; Witte 1994, 113; Witte 1992, 329). Because a fear appeal is a kind of argument about harmful consequences, and because arguments about harmful consequences are commonplace in deliberations, fear appeals are practically inevitable in civic discourse. And, as some scholars have recently confirmed, making fear appeals may be appropriate in civic discourse (Walton 2000, 139; Pfau 2007, 228). The challenge is to explain how they generate persuasive force—how they reasonably pressure addressees to act as the speaker advocates.¹ The stakes are high; playing on citizens' fears may result in poor decisions with dire results.

Leading models of fear appeals have involved two kinds of approaches: social scientific models explain why individuals may or may not be persuaded by a message; humanistic models explain what kinds of messages speakers ought to design in order to meet normative criteria. The problem is that these models do not capture the dynamic nature of rhetorical transactions—the interaction--and, consequently, provide limited accounts of the persuasive force of fear appeals in civic deliberations. They locate persuasive force primarily in internal states, such as addressees' cognitions or emotions. In doing so, they omit key parts of rhetorical transactions such as the speaker, actual message design, and bilateral communication vectors. The normative pragmatic model proposed here provides a more complete account by describing persuasive force in terms of

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strategies speakers use to design fear appeals. Put simply, fear appeals are designed to (1) make manifest that the speaker has made a responsible assessment of potential fearful outcomes and how to address them and (2) forestall criticism for poor judgment or fear-mongering. Persuasive force (1) is generated by message design features such as claiming that harmful consequences will occur unless addressees act as the speaker advocates, presenting grounds, and using intense language; and (2) is located in risks and commitments that these design features make manifest.

To support these claims, I briefly overview how a normative pragmatic model describes rhetorical transactions. I then detail three leading models of fear appeals and point to characteristics of rhetorical transactions that they account for in a limited way or not at all. Finally I make a case for a normative pragmatic model of fear appeals. In discussing other models as well as illustrating and supporting a case for the plausibility of a normative pragmatic one, I analyze how speakers design fear appeals in an actual case of high-stakes civic deliberations: the 1787 debates in Virginia about whether to ratify the proposed United States Constitution. Since many issues debated center on the topic of harmful consequences--the potential harms of ratifying the Constitution or not--fear appeals are at times rampant. The three-week span of the debates, the almost equal support for and against ratification, and the high stakes contribute to the frequency and intensity of fear appeals and of comments upon making fear appeals. Because the debates take place within a well-circumscribed amount of time and in a well-circumscribed location, it is possible to track the making and discussion of fear appeals. Moreover, since the debates take place in a republican political institution and the subject matter involves features of a republican political institution, they provide insight into appropriate places for fear appeals in republican forms of government.

A normative pragmatic model of communication takes into account all elements of a basic communication scenario: speaker, speech, audience, and context. It also takes into account bilateral communication vectors: speaker-to-speech and speech-to-speaker; speech-to-audience and audience-to-speech.ⁱⁱ As a result, it describes context less in terms of external elements such as time limits than in terms of rhetorical elements such as presenting evidence. In other words, it describes the context generated just by saying something. As Goodwin (2007, 85) has put it: "We do not assume that context comes already organized into social forms like 'dialogues' or 'critical discussions.' Instead, we take the talk through which, and within which, arguments are deployed as the primary means by which people organize a context for their interaction."

Saying something enables and constrains what both speaker and audience may say, which, in turn, changes the context. A normative pragmatic model explains why message design features may be expected to reasonably pressure addressees to act as the speaker advocates; so it explains the persuasive force of message design features in a way that transcends wholly normative and wholly descriptive explanations (Innocenti 2005, 142; cf. Jacobs 2000, 264-65; van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992, 6; van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, and Jacobs 1993, 1-2; Walton 2000, 22). In short, a normative pragmatic model is oriented toward describing public commitments made manifest by speaking.

In what follows I detail three leading models of fear appeals: the Extended Parallel Process Model, a classical model, and a logical model. These models omit characteristics of rhetorical transactions such as the speaker or message source, bilateral communication vectors, and characteristic message design features; and are oriented toward internal cognitions and states of mind. I illustrate

explanatory problems by considering how each model addresses a significant, serious charge against a fear appeal: it is manipulative.

Extended Parallel Process Model

A representative social scientific model of fear appeals that continues to be an important starting point for fear appeals research is the Extended Parallel Process Model (Witte 1992, 1994; Nabi, Roskos-Ewoldsen, and Carpentier 2008, 191, 192; Timmers and van der Wijst 2007, 22-23; Cho and Salmon 2006, 92). The EPPM analyzes fear appeals based on the following message components: self-efficacy, response efficacy, susceptibility, and severity. It models addressees' reasoning in response to the message components as follows. Addressees first reason about the threat (susceptibility and severity) and then about the efficacy of the recommended response and their ability to perform it (self-efficacy and response efficacy). If perceived threat is low, then motivation to continue processing the message--and, specifically, to evaluate efficacy--will be low. If perceived threat is high and if perceived efficacy is higher than perceived threat, then individuals are more likely to engage in danger control processes to protect themselves and will accept the message. But if perceived threat is high and if perceived efficacy is low, then individuals are more likely to engage in fear control processes--attempts to control their own fear rather than respond to dangerous circumstances--and reject the message, perhaps with the rationale that the message is manipulative (Witte 1994, 115-16; 1992, 337-45).

This model is not designed to account for the degree to which a fear appeal meets normative criteria--for whether an addressee's perceptions of threat and efficacy are reasonable, for example. A normative pragmatic model of fear appeals, in contrast, explains message design features and the kinds of public responses by addressees that they enable and constrain. For example, the message design features speakers use to present claims about threat and efficacy may warrant a charge by addressees that the speaker is attempting to manipulate them. Perhaps the language used appears to be too intense or the evidence presented for the proximity of the threat appears to be weak. Message design features such as these--presenting weak evidence, using language that is too intense--may better explain an addressee's charge of manipulation than the individual addressee's cognitions about his low perceived efficacy in the face of high perceived threat.

The Virginia ratifying convention debates illustrate this point. In these debates delegates charge opponents with using fear appeals to manipulate. For example, they say, "Are we to be terrified into a belief of its necessity" and "It is a groundless objection, to work on gentlemen's apprehensions" (Elliot 1891, 285, 427; see also 54, 62, 638). But this kind of statement is not best explained as an attempt by delegates to control the fear they feel in response to a fear appeal made by an opponent--as an outcome of delegates' perceptions of low perceived efficacy in the face of high perceived threat. First, it seems as if perceived efficacy by any individual delegate would be high; since the vote was close--the results depended on about six votes (Briceland 1988, 212-13; Einhorn 1990, 148-49)--an individual delegate could reasonably assert that his vote may determine the outcome of the debate. Second, delegates would be vulnerable to criticism were they to apparently base their decision on feelings of fear instead of an assessment of grounds for fear. This vulnerability is made manifest as delegates call for reasoned deliberation. One notes, for example, that like religion, politics "is too often nourished by passion, at the

expense of the understanding" and another asks, "was it proper to appeal to the fears of this house? The question before us belongs to the judgment of this house" (Elliot 1891, 23, 42; see also 86-87, 177, 237). Rather than viewing accusations of manipulation as signs of cognitions about perceived threat and perceived efficacy, a normative pragmatic approach would view accusations of manipulation as acts by an addressee that a designer of a fear appeal would want to forestall. A speaker who wants to design a fear appeal with persuasive force—reasonable pressure to act as the speaker advocates—needs to do so in a way that constrains addressees' ability to openly dismiss the appeal as manipulative.

This brief discussion points to interrelated features of rhetorical transactions not covered by the EPPM. First, the EPPM does not include a speaker or message source; it covers how message components affect addressees' cognitions. Second, the EPPM describes the message in relatively static terms—as comprising message components which, in turn, are described in terms of objects of addressees' cognitions, namely threat (susceptibility and severity) and efficacy (self and response)—rather than as a dynamic transaction that involves strategies such as presenting evidence. Third, the EPPM does not account for communication vectors other than message-to-addressee.

Classical model

Two other leading models of fear appeals are designed to be normative. One may be described as classical since it is warranted by Aristotle's writings and illustrated by Demosthenes' practice. Pfau posits this model to address the question "What particular kinds of fear appeals are most and least civically responsible" (2007, 218). He proposes "an Aristotelian approach in which the structure of the fear appeal is [. . .] designed to open up political debate and deliberations" (2007, 220). Civic fear appeals possess "the following components":

1. In reference to an object of fear that is unrecognized or underappreciated by the audience.
2. The rhetor carries out the following steps:
 - a. Portraying the object of fear as
 - i. Painful and destructive, and
 - ii. Close at hand (spatially and/or temporally).
 - b. Constructing the object of fear as contingent rather than necessary.
 - c. As needed, cultivating the virtue courage in the audience.
3. In order to open a space for deliberation about the range of possible actions capable of addressing the object of fear. (2007, 232)

This model is intended to define an ideal; Demosthenes' rhetorical practice is "an almost textbook illustration" (2007, 225; see also 228) rather than a source of or grounds for the model. Aristotle's writings on rhetoric, politics, and ethics are the source (2007, 225), so Aristotelian folk psychology grounds it.

This classical model stipulates two key points at which speakers may be vulnerable to a charge of manipulation. First, the model stipulates that the object of fear must be unrecognized or underappreciated by the audience. Pfau speculates "that rhetorical intensification of already dreaded fears is almost always a sure sign of the very kinds of logical distortion and audience manipulation traditionally associated with fear appeals in political discourse" (2007, 231). Significantly, Pfau does not ascribe logical distortion and audience manipulation to intensification; in this model there is nothing to suggest that using intense language cannot be reasonable. At issue is how to decide whether intensity is manipulative or reasonable. One measure suggested here is located in the minds of addressees: If they recognize or appreciate the object of fear—if they already dread it—then it is likely that the fear appeal is manipulative.

Another measure suggested by this classical model involves a second key point at which speakers may be vulnerable to a charge of manipulation: the purpose in making a fear appeal. In contrast to a fear appeal designed "simply to gain compliance with the message source's recommended response," with a civic fear appeal "the rhetor seeks to encourage collective foresight by way of opening up political deliberations regarding the object of fear" (2007, 231-32). This measure is also internal, located in a speaker's ethical intent. This classical model, then, does not explain how speakers may design a fear appeal to avoid the charge of manipulation. Instead it stipulates what knowledge internal to addressees or what intent internal to speakers makes it more likely that the fear appeal meets the normative standard of "opening up deliberation." Moreover, in this classical model "opening up deliberation" refers to inducing an internal state of mind; civic fear is "a deliberative emotion" (2007, 225). The model does not account for how a fear appeal may be designed to pressure addressees to make manifest that they are deliberating—to in fact speak.

This stipulation of a speaker's intent excludes additional or alternative purposes for which speakers may design fear appeals at all and as they do. For example, this classical model defines away an ordinary understanding of why speakers make fear appeals: to gain compliance with a recommended response. In addition, consider reasons delegates give for making fear appeals in the Virginia ratifying convention debates. Making fear appeals may be a way to make it "known that my opposition arose from a full persuasion and conviction of its being dangerous to the liberties of my country" (Elliot 1891, 643). Other things being equal, making manifest a responsible assessment of the grounds for fear enables the delegate to avoid criticism for, say, his vote being based on local interests or outside influence (e.g. Elliot 1891, 7, 177, 182, 237, 356, 364). Making fear appeals may also be a way for delegates to make manifest that they are fulfilling their duties as representatives. Delegates say, for example, that they are representing the interests of some portion of the public: "I represent their feelings when I say that they are exceedingly uneasy at being brought from that state of full security, which they enjoyed, to the present delusive appearance of things" (Elliot 1891, 21; see also 63). Or they refer to a broader audience when they say that posterity "will see that I have done my utmost to preserve their liberty" and that they "wish to hand down to posterity my opposition to this system, [so] I conceive it to be my duty to declare the principles on which I disapprove it, and the cause of my opposition" (Elliot 1891, 56, 637; see also 642, 652). By making manifest a responsible assessment of the circumstances, they attempt to avoid criticism for shirking their duties; they make manifest an attempt to "discharge their duty with fidelity and zeal" (Elliot 1891, 14). In fact, this helps to explain why delegates make fear appeals at all—why they do not simply cast a vote—when doing so may make them vulnerable to criticism for fear-mongering or poor

judgment. If they remain silent, they risk criticism for failing to warn about potential harmful consequences.

This discussion points to features of rhetorical transactions not covered by this classical model. First, this classical model does not cover a range of purposes speakers may have for making fear appeals, including the basic purpose of gaining compliance. Second, this classical model describes the message in relatively static terms of individuals' cognitions about message components: recognizing or appreciating an object of fear; perceiving it as painful, destructive, close at hand, contingent; feeling courage. Even the ideal outcome of the fear appeal—opening deliberations regarding an object of fear—involves inducing a state of mind or emotional disposition (Pfau 2007, 233). Third, this classical model covers unilateral communication vectors only: speaker-to-message and message-to-addressee. A model that incorporates the message-to-speaker vector would be able to account for "rhetorical intensification" as relatively manipulative or not based not on what the speaker believes about what addressees recognize or appreciate about the object of fear but on openly undertaken, public commitments that using intense language makes manifest to addressees. In addition, an audience-to-message vector would incorporate a judgment about whether the message is designed in a way that constrains addressees from openly dismissing the appeal as manipulative; such a judgment would not depend on an audience's state of mind but on message design features.

Logical model

A second normative model of fear appeals may be described as logical. I focus on Walton's model because it is representative of a logical approach and is the most comprehensive treatment of fear appeals in argumentation theory research (see also Pinto 2004, 261, 269). Walton's model comprises an underlying practical inference structure that critics use to evaluate the logical cogency of fear appeal arguments.

1. If you (the respondent) bring about *A*, then *B* will occur.
2. *B* is a very bad outcome, from your (the respondent's) point of view (or interests).
3. *B* is such a bad outcome that it is likely to evoke fear in you (the respondent).

Therefore, you (the respondent) should not bring about *A*. (2000, 200)

Critics evaluate this inference structure by considering the acceptability of the premises and by asking critical questions such as whether there is a better way of avoiding the bad outcome (2000, 130; see also 138). They assess relevance by considering the type of dialogue--e.g., persuasion, negotiation, deliberation, eristic--in which the fear appeal is made (2000, 145; see also 177, 180, 203). Evaluation is based on whether the argument facilitates or impedes the goal of the dialogue. This may not be a simple task since actual rhetorical practices may not fit squarely into any single dialogue type. For example, Walton notes that a political debate "can involve persuasion dialogue, negotiation dialogue, deliberation, and eristic dialogue, all in the same case" (2000, 182; see also 198-99) and advises critics to not

"condemn all *ad baculum* arguments on the grounds that they are irrelevant in a critical discussion or informed deliberation of political issues" (2000, 199).

Although the logical model is designed to represent "the cognitive component in how [fear appeal arguments] work to persuade" (2000, 23), Walton describes the model in dynamic terms: "[t]he structure is of such a kind that there has to be a sender and a receiver of the argument" (2000, 131). For example, he observes that "if the respondents get any sense that the probability of the threatening outcome is being exaggerated, they will use that as an avenue to escape from the pressure of the argument" (2000, 193; see also 1996, 312). Walton amplifies:

By putting the argument in the form of a practical inference, the speaker tightens a kind of logical net around the hearer. [. . .] The question then posed is how the hearer can wriggle out of this net by challenging the premises, or finding some weakness in the linkage whereby the premises force the conclusion drawn in the argument. The hearer needs to respond to this logical argument by examining, or critically questioning its strong or weak points as a practical inference. The speaker and hearer can be seen as engaging in a kind of logical dialogue with each other. This theory represents a logical model of how the two parties are reasoning with each other in an orderly and structured way that represents a kind of practical rationality. (2000, 131)

The model prescribes "how each agent should reason . . . [and] react" (2000, 132). It also treats the emotion of fear as a source of the force of the appeal; "[t]he key mechanism is that the situation cited is supposed to be so fearful that it overcomes the inertia of the respondent in taking an action that requires a certain effort or cost on his part" (2000, 144).

This model is designed to help critics assess logical cogency and does just that and more as it begins to capture the interactive nature of rhetorical transactions. But in focusing on logical cogency only, it elides message design features other than logical cogency. As a result, it omits features that may comprise fear appeals such as using intense language; and it explains the persuasive force of fear appeals—why addressees may be reasonably pressured to act as the speaker advocates—in terms of logical cogency only. Logical cogency ought to generate persuasive force; and it is possible for a speaker to design a fear appeal in just the form of the underlying practical inference structure. But, based on the Virginia ratifying convention debates and civic deliberations generally, just that presentational design is atypical. A normative pragmatic model of fear appeals accounts for the actual presentational design—including but not only manifestations of logical cogency—and in doing so explains why a message design feature like using intense language can be reasonably expected to generate persuasive force (Innocenti 2005, 144-45; Jacobs 2000, 263).

Normative pragmatic model of fear appeals

The following discussion is organized around characteristic design features of fear appeals: claiming that harmful consequences will occur unless addressees act as the speaker advocates, presenting grounds, and using intense language. These actions make manifest public commitments which, in turn, alter the context such that speakers and addressees are enabled and constrained in what they may subsequently say. I explain how each message design feature may reasonably pressure addressees to act

as the speaker advocates. The explanation comprises practical reasoning on both sides of the transaction—speaker and addressee—and bilateral communication vectors that account for why speakers may reasonably expect strategies to pressure addressees to act. Underlying normative pragmatic models is a philosophy of language that involves describing theoretical models in terms of practical reasoning. These models do not purport that speakers in fact are actually reasoning in just the way described by the model (e.g., Kauffeld 2001). Likewise, the normative pragmatic model of fear appeals proposed here aims to account for message design features rather than make claims about what thoughts are consciously in a speaker's or addressee's mind (see also Goodwin 2001, 38-39; Kauffeld 2009, 240 n. 2). The normative pragmatic model of fear appeals is based on what delegates say about their own and other delegates' fear appeals.

At the core of a fear appeal is claiming that harmful consequences will occur unless addressees act as the speaker advocates. For example, opponents of ratification make statements such as: "If a wrong step be now made, the republic may be lost forever" and "If you attempt to force it [the proposed Constitution] down men's throats, and call it union, dreadful consequences must follow" (Elliot 1891, 22, 159; see also 44, 46, 50-51, 57, 149, 151, 378, 452, 527, 591). Proponents make statements such as "Our state vessel has sprung a leak; we must embark in a new bottom, or sink into perdition" and "If, in this situation, we reject the Constitution, the Union will be dissolved, the dogs of war will break loose, and anarchy and discord will complete the ruin of this country" (Elliot 1891, 106, 603; see also 37, 66, 70, 74, 90, 116, 132, 189, 329).

Why would a delegate claim that harmful consequences will occur unless addressees act as he advocates? Why not simply cast a vote? By remaining silent, a delegate risks criticism for failing to warn about potential harms and, in doing so, failing to fulfill his duties as an elected representative. As noted above, delegates provide just these kinds of reasons for why they make fear appeals. To avoid these kinds of criticism, a delegate may state potential harmful consequences of not acting as he advocates.

But claiming that harmful consequences will occur unless addressees act as he advocates carries risks of criticism for poor judgment or fear-mongering. The following disclaimers point to delegates' awareness of these risks: "I do not wish to frighten the members into a concession of this power, but to bring to their minds those considerations which demonstrate its necessity" and "This is not calculated to rouse the fears of the people. It is founded in truth" (Elliot 1891, 249, 313). It is just these kinds of risks openly undertaken by a speaker as he claims that harmful consequences will occur unless addressees act as he advocates that generate persuasive force for addressees to act as the speaker advocates. Disclaimers of this kind make manifest that the speaker knowingly undertakes risks and considers how addressees may publicly reason about his own reasoning or, put differently, what the message design enables addressees to say. Other things being equal, addressees may reason—may say—that the speaker would not risk criticism unless he had made a responsible effort to assess the circumstances; they see him risk criticism and see that he sees the risks, so the speaker's act of claiming that harmful consequences will occur unless addressees act as he advocates creates a practical reason for addressees to do just that. This practical reason is a component of persuasive force—reasonable pressure to act.

Another component of persuasive force is the risks for addressees created by this same strategy of claiming that harmful consequences will occur unless addressees act as the speaker advocates. Claiming that harmful consequences will occur constrains addressees' ability to say they did not think potential

harms would result from not acting as the speaker advocates because, other things being equal, saying so would put them at risk of criticism for irresponsible or poor judgment. It would be a fallible sign that they were not listening to the deliberations and, consequently, not making a well-informed decision. To avoid such a risk, they can act as he advocates. Of course it is also possible for them to avoid such a risk by arguing—by making a case that harms are unlikely, for example, or that the speaker's recommended action is not the best way of avoiding them. The circumstances of the Virginia ratifying convention guaranteed that addressees would easily be able to avoid risks created just by claiming that harmful consequences would occur unless addressees act as the speaker advocates; delegates had time and the institution had procedures to challenge opposing arguments. For these reasons, as a speaker claims that harmful consequences will occur unless addressees act as he advocates in order to forestall criticism for failing to warn, so he continues to design the fear appeal in such a way as to forestall criticism in other areas such as whether grounds for fear exist at all and, if so, to what extent. As one delegate puts it, "Till they tell us the grounds of their fears, I will consider them as imaginary" and, as another responds, "I shall not rest content with asserting—I shall endeavor to prove" (Elliot 1891, 48, 71).

Based on this analysis, it is predictable that another characteristic feature of making fear appeals with persuasive force is presenting grounds. In the Virginia ratifying convention debates, for example, delegates make statements such as: "When we take a more accurate view of the principles of the Senate, we shall have grounds to fear that the interest of our state may be totally neglected;" "I have every reason for determining within myself that our rejection must dissolve the Union; and that that dissolution will destroy our political happiness;" "Contemplate our situation deliberately, and consult history; it will inform you that people in our circumstances have ever been attacked, and successfully: open any page, and you will there find our danger truly depicted;" "This altercation terminated in the dissolution of their union. From this brief account of a system perfectly resembling our present one, we may easily divine the inevitable consequences of a longer adherence to the latter;" and "If this Constitution were safer, I should not be afraid. But its defects warrant my suspicions and fears" (Elliot, 1891, 221, 68, 74 [see also 7]; 133, 641).

How does presenting grounds for fear generate persuasive force? Why may speakers expect this strategy to reasonably pressure addressees to act as they advocate? As was true for stating potential harmful consequences, presenting grounds carries risks of criticism for poor judgment or fear-mongering. Speakers make manifest that they knowingly undertake these risks when they say, for example, "that I may not be charged with urging suppositions, let us see what ground this stands upon, and whether there be any real danger to be apprehended;" "Perhaps the same horrors may hang over my mind again. I shall be told I am continually afraid: but, sir, I have strong cause of apprehension;" "My fears are not the force of imagination; they are but too well founded." "I hope that my fears are groundless;" "many horrors present themselves to my mind. They may be imaginary, but it appears to my mind to be the most abominable system that could be imagined" (Elliot 1891, 12, 47, 141, 282, 327). Again, it is just the risk of these kinds of criticism manifestly undertaken by a speaker when he presents grounds that generates persuasive force for addressees to act as the speaker advocates. Making manifest that he knowingly accepts risks of criticism for poor judgment and fear-mongering when he presents grounds again shows that he considers how addressees may publicly reason about his own reasoning—about what they may say about his appeal. The appeal is designed in a way that enables addressees to say that the speaker would not risk the criticism that the act of presenting grounds makes him vulnerable to unless he had made a

responsible effort to collect and assess grounds for fear. Thus presenting grounds creates a practical reason—in addition to the grounds themselves—for addressees to act as the speaker advocates. This practical reason is a component of the persuasive force generated by the strategy of presenting grounds.

Another component of the persuasive force generated by this strategy is the risks created for addressees. Presenting grounds constrains addressees' ability to say they do not see grounds for fear. This ability is further constrained as delegates make manifest what they "see" and have "examined," and as they say that opponents cannot fail to see grounds they have presented (e.g., Elliot 1891, 187, 191, 243, 303, 354, 396, 436, 470, 473-74). Other things being equal, addressees saying they do not see grounds for fear would be a fallible sign that they were not paying attention to the deliberations or that they do not recognize good grounds—both of which would make them vulnerable to criticism for shirking or failing in their duties as representatives. To evade this risk, they can act as the speaker advocates. They may also attempt to evade it by arguing—by making a case, for example, that the grounds do not exist or are not as dangerous as the speaker suggests. Since the circumstances of the Virginia ratifying convention debates made these kinds of evasive maneuvers likely, a speaker would want to constrain addressees' ability to make them. The stronger the presentation of grounds, the more difficult it is for addressees to say that grounds for fears are weak without risking criticism, and therefore the more persuasive force the fear appeal has—the more it constrains addressees to either act as the speaker advocates or manifest the comparable rationality of their position or, put differently, to deliberate well.

A third characteristic feature of fear appeals is intensity. Speakers may design fear appeals of varying intensity by attending to word choice, syntax, and broader units of composition. In the Virginia ratifying convention debates, Patrick Henry makes the most intense fear appeals in terms of quantity and quality. Examples of Henry's intense language include the following: proponents of the proposed U.S. Constitution are trying to force the document "down men's throats;" there is nothing in the constitution to prevent the federal sheriff "from sucking your blood;" the state sheriffs are "unfeeling blood-suckers" who have "committed the most horrid and barbarous ravages on our people;" "Away with your President! we shall have a king; the army will salute him monarch; your militia will leave you, and assist in making him king, and fight against you; want what have you to oppose this force? What will then become of you and your rights? Will not absolute despotism ensue?" and "I see the awful immensity of the dangers with which it is pregnant. I see it. I feel it. I see beings of a higher order anxious concerning our decision" (Elliot 1891, 159, 57-58, 59-60, 625; see also 448-49).

Levels of intensity may range from low to high. At issue is what level of intensity is appropriate. Certainly speakers are vulnerable to criticism for designing fear appeals that are short or long on intensity, and these assessments are based on all elements in rhetorical transactions, including the point in a speech or broader public controversy at which the fear appeal is made, the audience, the subject matter, and the occasion (Innocenti 2006, 337; Jacobs 2000, 263). In the Virginia ratifying convention debates, delegates target Henry's intense fear appeals with criticism including: he has "entertained," "frightened," and "exclaimed, with uncommon vehemence," but his argument appears "inconclusive and inaccurate;" they admire "his declamatory talents; but I trust that neither declamation nor elegance of periods will mislead the judgment of any member here, and that nothing but the force of reasoning will operate conviction;" he has "discarded, in a great measure, solid argument and strong reasoning, and has established a new system of throwing those bolts which he has so peculiar a dexterity at discharging;" and "the rhetoric of the gentleman has highly colored the dangers of giving the general government an indefinite power of

providing for the general welfare" (Elliot 1891, 98, 101, 104, 177 [see also 383], 466). Certainly using intense language makes speakers vulnerable to criticism for manipulating rather than arguing. Even Henry charges opponents with presenting "dangers of a very uncommon nature. I am not acquainted with the arts of painting. Some gentlemen have a peculiar talent for them. They are practised with great ingenuity on this occasion" and asserts: "it is the fortune of a free people not to be intimidated by imaginary dangers. Fear is the passion of slaves" (Elliot 1891, 153-54, 140).

Perhaps intensity more than other design features carries risks of criticism for fear-mongering. This accounts for why, with occasional exceptions, intensity is not a message design feature delegates typically employ in making fear appeals. But why Henry chooses to make highly intense fear appeals may be gleaned from the following disclaimer: "My sentiments may appear extravagant, but I can tell you that a number of my fellow-citizens have kindred sentiments, and I am anxious, if my country should come into the hands of tyranny, to exculpate myself from being in any degree the cause, and to exert my faculties to the utmost to extricate her" (Elliot 1891, 176; see also 56). He even goes so far as to assert that "conscious rectitude" both compels him to state his fears of the proposed Constitution even though these appeals have lead opponents to charge him with being a demagogue and, in these circumstances, consoles him (Elliot 1891, 45, 54). He makes manifest that he knowingly accepts the risk of criticism and in doing so creates a practical reason for addressees to act as he advocates. Intensity changes the rhetorical context such that addressees may publicly reason that he would not risk criticism unless he had made a responsible effort to assess grounds for fear and to act in accordance with that judgment and with his duty as a representative. Thus intensity lends persuasive force to the fear appeal. But the risks incurred by using this strategy also help to explain why Henry interjects his own character into his rhetoric more so than other delegates.ⁱⁱⁱ The greater the intensity of the fear appeal, the more vulnerable he is to the change of manipulation, so the more reason to make manifest that he accepts accountability for the veracity and proportion of his fear appeals.

At the same time, intensity creates some risk for addressees. Other things being equal, intensity makes it more difficult for them to say, for example, that they did not see potential harms or the severity of the threat. To avoid this risk, they can act as the speaker advocates, or argue. But since intensity creates a context in which addressees may charge a speaker with manipulating rather than reasoning—and especially in this case where the norm of deliberating reasonably was made manifest—this design feature pressures addressees to manifest rationality—to demand that the speaker do so and to do so themselves. And thus an apparently manipulative appeal may create conditions for better deliberation even if its persuasive force is weak.

Conclusions

The normative pragmatic model of fear appeals proposed here begins with characteristic design features of fear appeals—claiming that harmful consequences will occur unless addressees act as the speaker advocates, presenting grounds, using intense language—and comprises complex, interlocking practical reasoning that explains why these message design features reasonably pressure addressees to act as the speaker advocates or, in other words, why they generate persuasive force. It incorporates basic elements of rhetorical transactions—speaker, speech, audience, and context—and bilateral

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communication vectors. It transcends the normative-descriptive divide as it accounts for why what is normative has persuasive force. It provides an account of how to generate good deliberation that does not depend on the good will of either speaker or addressees; it explains how even reluctant or adversarial addressees acting in self-interest only may be reasonably pressured to deliberate well.

This analysis explains how speakers who make fear appeals deploy and maintain rhetorical norms. External factors such as educating citizens in critical thinking and having a free press that serves as a watchdog may help to cultivate rhetorical norms. This analysis explains how rhetorical practices may also be self-regulating; it suggests that when the practitioners hold themselves and each other accountable for the veracity and proportion of their claims, they design fear appeals with more persuasive force. So fear appeals that feature accountability have an important place in republican forms of government.

Notes

ⁱ On this sense of "persuasive force," see for example Goodwin 2001; 2002, 91-94; Innocenti 2005, 140-42; and especially Kauffeld 1995, 1998.

ⁱⁱ Two foundational cases for the desirability and benefits of including all of these elements in rhetorical theories are Burke 1969 and Black 1978. This essay makes a case for the superior explanatory power of a model of civic fear appeals that encompasses these elements compared to models of fear appeals that do not.

ⁱⁱⁱ See for example Elliot 1891, 23, 44, 45, 47, 50, 54, 56, 137, 151, 546, 592. Randolph is the proponent of the proposed Constitution who makes the most intense fear appeals, and he too frequently interjects his character into his rhetoric; but he also needed to defend his record since he previously publicly opposed the Constitution (e.g., Elliot 1891, 24-27, 65-68, 85-86, 189).

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