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Re-framing climate controversy: The strategies of *The Hartwell Paper*

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ABSTRACT: In the public sphere, standpoints often seem to be locked into pro/con constellations. This essay documents the strategies of "pointing out," narrative and metaphor used in *The Hartwell Paper* to gain a hearing for a radically different approach to climate policy. These methods of evocation serve to create the conditions for a more complex polylogue, and more generally show the importance of non-argument in making argument possible.

KEYWORDS: argumentation, normative pragmatics, climate communication, environmental communication, ecomodernism, evocation

Given that there are innumerable issues of potential public concern at multiple scales, and various possible ways forward on each of them, we would expect that publicly defended standpoints would be as abundant as the stars in the sky. But that is not our ordinary experience of civic deliberations. Instead, the standpoints that appear in public space appear to be grouped into a relatively limited number of constellations. Take climate change as an example (Table 1). It is not surprising that we find some advocate arguing for, others against the Kyoto Protocol, the international regime under which nations committed to CO2 emission reduction targets. Since the existence of anthropogenic global warming provides key support for the Kyoto Protocol, it's again not surprising that the advocates divide neatly on that issue as well. And the division of the advocates on the importance of environmental issues generally is also plausible. But things become a bit more mysterious when we consider nuclear power and fracking. Although these might be seen as approaches for meeting emission targets, we know that pro-Kyoto/AGW-believer advocates also tend to reject both. Indeed, the constellations extend to environmental issues like GMOs that have little to do with climate change, and even to issues like abortion that have little to do with the environment.

Table 1: Constellations of standpoints in climate controversies

Constellation L	**Constellation R**
The Kyoto Protocol is good!	The Kyoto Protocol is bad!
AGW is real and serious—scientists agree.	AGW is not real and/or not serious and/or scientists disagree.
Environmental issues should be a top priority.	Environmental issues should not be a top priority.
No nukes.	Nuclear power is not bad, and is maybe even good.
Fracking is bad.	Fracking is not bad, and is maybe even good.
Say no to GMOs.	GMOs are safe and effective.
Abortion should be legal (mostly).	Abortion should be illegal (mostly).

This focusing of the vast space of potential disagreements down to a limited number of mega-conflicts between constellations of standpoints (or party platforms, or ideologies, or cap-d hegemonic Discourses)[1] does have some positive impacts on the quality of public deliberations. It promotes the emergence and intensive development of robust standardized arguments (*topoi,* in one meaning of that term) through iterated pro/con dilogues on a determinate set of issues. It incentivizes advocates to become highly skilled at making those arguments. It allows ordinary folk to proceed efficiently, since a judgment on one standpoint permits them to inherit a large set of additional standpoints with no further cognitive labour. And it enables them to be equally efficient at social categorization, for if you're not with me, you're against me.

The negative impacts of limiting disagreements are equally apparent. Standpoint constellations lock in dilogues, suppressing potential argumentative polylogues (Aakhus & Lewinski, 2016; Lewinski & Aakhus, 2013) that might allow a broader range of arguments to get made and considered. Mainstream advocates participating in the set-piece dilogues may face few unexpected challenges and can get lazy. Advocates supporting standpoints between or beyond existing constellations are locked out of the process. And tribal polarization may not over the long term provide a stable social base for civic deliberations.

Arguers who want public discourse to shift from dilogue to polylogue thus face practical challenges in breaking through existing constellations. To continue the example above: consider the situation of advocates who want to demand action on climate change and environmental issues generally, while also arguing against the Kyoto Protocol and for nuclear power and fracking. They are likely to be seen as trojan horses by proponents of Constellation R, sneaking climate regulations through the opening provided by nuclear power; and as traitors by proponents of Constellation L, paying lip service to the environment while giving industry everything it wants. Neither L or R advocates may be willing to engage, and so a debate that goes beyond L v. R—a polylogue—may simply never get going.

In this paper, I propose to advance our understanding of the means non-constellated arguers have for gaining a hearing. This essay thus contributes to the growing body of research on the work it takes to get exchanges of arguments going, issuing especially from scholars adopting a normative pragmatic approach. An argumentative transactions is an achievement; arguers have to earn consideration of their views (Kauffeld, 1998; Innocenti Manolescu, 2007), make issues to be worth arguing (Goodwin, 2000), impose responsibilities to produce arguments (Kauffeld, 1998) and regulate the process as it goes along (Innocenti, 2011). Throughout the process, arguers must work is to overcome expectable and often legitimate sources of resistance. As Fabio Paglieri has been pointing out (2009, 2013, 2017; Paglieri & Castelfranchi, 2010) there are plenty of reasons *not* to start making arguments: it can confuse matters, escalate conflicts and damage reputations. It can waste time. It can prove you wrong. To this list, I now add inertia: the tendency of arguers to resist engaging arguments that jump out of well-worn tracks. What can arguers who want to press a novel perspective do to overcome this inertia?

I proceed through a case study of a presumably competent attempt to open a polylogue. The *Hartwell Paper* (Prins et al., 2010) was produced when two groups of experienced arguers joined to press (in the words of the subtitle) for "a new direction for climate policy after the crash of 2009" (Figure 1). In the US, activists Michael Shellenberger

[1] Note that I focus here on standpoints defended in the public sphere. A much broader range of political philosophies are elaborated in the technical sphere—for example, the environmental stances traced by Rodrigues, Lewiński and Uzelgun (2019). In addition, individual members of the public likely have more mixed up views; a Catholic steelworker might vote Democrat, hold pro-life views, and also support national health insurance. Recent polling, however, suggests that individuals are polarizing along the same lines as the constellations of standpoints I identify here (Pew Research Center, 2014).

and Ted Nordhaus had been advocating for a new way forward on environmental problems since their 2004 whitepaper, *The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-Environmental World*. In the UK, science studies scholars Gwyn Prins and Steve Rayner had joined to warn against the unintended consequences of the Kyoto approach in their *The Wrong Trousers: Radically Rethinking Climate Policy* (2007). These leading figures were joined by ten additional academic co-authors, several of whom had published similar critiques of mainstream approaches to climate policy and science. As a group, they had a substantial track record in trying to articulate a new approach to the climate debate, and environmental issues generally (Nisbet, 2014). They met retreat in February, 2010 at the eponymous Hartwell House, an estate converted into a hotel; the *Paper* was issued a few months later.[2]

Figure 1: The front page of *The Hartwell Paper*

The immediate occasion for their meeting was the disaster of COP 15, the Copenhagen Summit, in December, 2009. The Summit had been supposed to produce a follow-up to the Kyoto Protocol, due to expire in 2012. Instead, beyond-last-minute, behind-the-scenes negotiations produced nothing more than a weak set of non-binding recommendations that were non-unanimously "taken note of." Contributing to the procedural and substantive disaster were: the refusal of a coalition of developing nations to discuss restrictions on their economic growth; demands from island states for immediate, deep emission cuts and recompense for climate injuries; and a new US president unable to live up to his campaign promises but (as always) willing to throw the country's weight around. The entire drama played out against the background of the "Climategate" emails, which two weeks before had revealed some unsavoury-looking sausage-making among leading climate scientists.

In its Parts II and III—approximately 85% of the text—the authors of the *Hartwell Paper* lay out the principles of and policy levers for a new approach to climate change. Put simply, they recommend dropping the Kyoto Protocol's emphasis on emission caps and instead pursuing broadly popular goals like energy efficiency, energy equity and research into clean technologies. These measures (say the authors) achieve modest gains in decarbonization while simultaneously building coalitions for further action. The authors in these two parts are clearly making a proposal: putting forth their standpoints for serious consideration while undertaking a burden of proof to answer reasonable doubts and objections against them.

[2] The joining of the transatlantic groups may have been brokered by noted North American "alternative" thinkers Roger Pielke, Jr, Dan Sarewitz and Christopher Green who were associated with Nordhaus & Shellenberger's Breakthrough Institute and also co-authors with Rayner, Prins and others from the EU of an intermediate whitepaper, *How to Get Climate Policy Back On Course* (2009).

Explicitly labelled arguments get made and refuted, and further exchanges are invited; the *Paper* closes by positioning itself "as a first, not as a last word" on its approach (p. 36).

All this is a customary argumentative activity, already well understood by argumentation theorists (especially Kauffeld, 1998). But as the authors openly acknowledge, not everything they are doing is so traditional. The *Paper* openly presents itself "radical"—a word used 16 times over 30 pages, including in the titles of both Parts II and III ("Radical Reframing," "Radical Departure") and in the final summary calling for "a radical rethinking and then a reordering of the climate policy agenda" (p. 36). The *Paper* similarly portrays itself as "invert[ing] the conventional wisdom" on the bearing of science to policy (p. 19) and on the focus on long-term over short-term goals (p. 10, 13). There can be, it proclaims, no "single, governing, coherent and enforceable thing called 'climate policy'" (p. 7); in a zen-like turn, the climate policy proposed by the *Hartwell Paper* is no climate policy at all.

The authors of the *Hartwell Paper* thus face a pressing challenge. How can they secure the minimum of engagement necessary for there to be an audience for their upside-down no-policy policy?—how can they get people even to read Parts II and III, much less to engage them argumentatively? Climate policy, including taxes, but with no mention of CO2 emissions? That set of standpoints is likely to be dismissed out of hand by proponents of standpoints in the familiar L/R, pro/con dilogue in Table 1. The authors' response to this challenge thus can give us indications about how advocates in general can force open constellations of standpoints, making room for argumentative polylogues.

Part I of the *Hartwell Paper* presumably provides the inducement for readers to go on to the remainder of the document, so I here examine the discursive work accomplished in that Part (plus the Executive Summary), and in particular in its first paragraph:

> [1] One year ago, few would have guessed that by the spring of 2010 climate policy would be in such public disarray. [2] Two watersheds were crossed during the last months of 2009, one political and one scientific. [3] The narratives and assumptions upon which major Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) governments had relied until that moment in shaping and pushing international climate policy towards becoming global climate policy have been undermined. [4] The course that climate policy has been pursuing for more than a decade is no longer sustainable – climate policy must find a new way forward. [5] And that presents us with an immense opportunity to set climate policy free to fly at last. [6] The principal motivation and purpose of this paper is to explain and to advance this opportunity (p. 6).

Let us go through this paragraph sentence by sentence, seeing how it makes room for the *Paper's* "inverted" proposals.

The paragraph opens with a declaration of a fact it takes to be "public"—obvious to all—namely that climate policy is in "disarray" [1]. The emphasis on the *apparentness* of the inadequacy of the Kyoto regime and its accompanying science reoccurs throughout Part I; the authors portray themselves as simply "observing" what "seems inescapable" (p. 8), "plain" (p. 5), and "discernable" (p. 10). What is euphemistically termed "disarray" in the opening sentence is elsewhere referred to more bluntly as a "crash," starting on the cover page in the Paper's subtitle. A crash is a conspicuous, attention-drawing event; hearing an explosive bang and seeing a mass of twisted steel, one doesn't need to weigh considerations about what just happened. One sees: the car has crashed.

At this point, with one policy-car crashed, the authors might be expected to reveal their new model and start arguing for its comparative advantages in carrying us forward. But instead of taking the *inferential* step from the evidence of a crash to a conclusion about the

vehicle's inadequacy, the *Paper* continues the *temporal* ordering started in the first sentence's opening reference to "one year ago" [1]. In the time since then, "two watersheds were crossed" [2]. The following paragraphs elaborate these watershed-crossings—the Copenhagen Summit and the Climategate affair— in brief narratives with no indicators that anyone would disagree. Indeed, the whole progression over the period has been from more to less disagreement: "we begin," the authors later explain, by "observing what was once controversial but which now seems inescapable: for progress to occur on climate policy, we must reframe the issue in a fundamental way: not simply in various procedural details" (p. 8).

The conspicuousness of the crash has thus dragged into the light what is ordinarily hidden: "the narratives and assumptions upon which major…governments had relied until that moment in shaping and pushing international climate policy" [3]. At issue are not the surface details of the policy—for example, the year to be selected as a baseline, the exact emission targets for each nation or the method of calculating them. Instead, "'problem is epistemological'" (p. 7); the "error…fundamental" (p.15). The general principles on which climate policy is built have been "undermined" [3]. What is needed then is not so much new policy, as a new "framing," to use the word the *Paper* deploys on average more than once per page.[3] For example: in the old framing, climate policy aimed to mitigate the CO2 emissions which drive climate change. Wrong. Writing with repetitions that emphasize the certainty of their statement, the authors state "there is no evidence that, despite vast investment of time, effort and money, the 'Kyoto' type approach has produced any discernable acceleration of decarbonisation whatsoever: not anywhere; not in any region" (p. 10). So "it is now plain that it is not possible to have a 'climate policy' that has emissions reductions as the all encompassing goal" (p. 5). Instead, the "object of emissions reduction [will be achieved indirectly] via other goals, riding with other constituencies and gathering other benefits" (p. 9). Or again: in the old framing, the certainty of climate science provides the basis for climate policy. No; that is a "flawed assumption"—a "mis-framing" (p. 17). Instead, it's clear that it is precisely the uncertainties of the science that provide the grounds for policies that will be robust against a large range of eventualities.

It is at this point that the authors of the *Hartwell Paper* offer their first argument—their first step from a premise to a conclusion. Because "the course that climate policy has been pursuing for more than a decade is no longer sustainable [therefore] climate policy must find a new way forward" [4]. The crash is less a dire emergency than an opening, a *kairos*: "an immense opportunity to set climate policy to fly free at last" [5]. And thus the purpose of the rest of the *Paper*: "to explain and to advance this opportunity" [6].

In summary: The opening section of the *Hartwell Paper* needs to earn its audience's attention to the upside-down proposal it offers in later section. The authors proceed by a strategy of "pointing out," drawing readers' attention to circumstances that are plain and undisputable. In other words, the authors proceed through non-argumentative discourse. Why is this strategy significant? Consider again the situation the authors face. The ultimate goal of all advocates on climate issues is to take any actions needed to save the planet (Figure 2). Since arguing about appropriate responses provides opportunities for justifying policies (normatively), improving them (epistemically), and building support for them (pragmatically), a policy debate is likely worth the time and effort involved. There is a room for argument before the room for action. The *Hartwell Paper* is now moving readers up another level, to examine the framing (assumptions, basic perspectives) underlying the debate, as a way to get

[3] This appears to be what Perelman termed a "reversal" of the ordinary appearance/reality dissociation (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, §89, 92). Instead of urging readers to abandon policies that seem on the surface attractive but are in a deeper way ineffective, the authors of the *Hartwell Paper* want readers to acknowledge the surface policy crash and abandon the deeper principles which brought it about. The real policy needs to align with what is apparent to all.

their novel proposals heard. The contours of the best framing, and the need for re-framing at all, could be debated—could be debated just as heatedly as the debate about climate policy. And why stop there? Arguers could go another level "meta-" and debate whether the *Hartwell Paper* has deployed the correct conception of "framing." But all that meta-debate would not seem to be getting us nearer to saving the planet. It would not significantly improve our situation, normatively, epistemically or pragmatically. At some point, there is no more room for meta-argument.

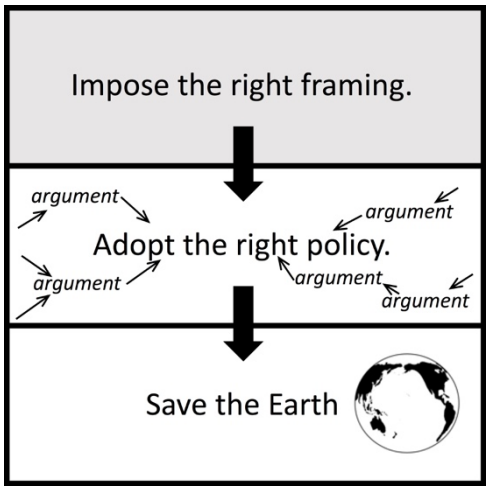

Figure 2: Rooms for action, for argument, and for non-argument

As Sally Jackson (2008) has noted, prudent management of probative responsibilities is key for both individual success and good collective outcomes in civic controversies (2008). Some kettles of fish are not worth opening. In particular, "meta-debate," like debate over the right way to frame the issue for debate, "does not, after all, really help to settle any of the individual controversies in which it emerges" (p. 228). Advocates therefore need strategies for establishing the conditions for argument that are not themselves argumentative—that don't invite dispute and further reasoning. The authors of the *Hartwell Paper* designed their text to make room for an argumentative polylogue over climate policy. But they designed it in way that *didn't* take on argumentative responsibilities for their re-framing. If challenged to defend the ruin of prior policies, they have left themselves room to refuse to respond.

In addition to "pointing-out," the first section of the *Hartwell Paper* contains several narratives, which I suggest function here in similar fashion—reminding readers of things they already accept. But instead of defending that claim I want to turn to examine one last strategy of non-argument. The opening of the *Paper* relies on strong *movement* metaphors, albeit somewhat mixed: after passing through "watersheds," climate policy has "crashed." It can no longer main its "course" and must "find a new way forward"—a new approach that will "set [it] free to fly at last." This metaphoric cluster is also hinted at in the subtitle of the paper, with its call for a "new direction for climate policy." In these uses, the metaphor suggests a sense of momentum, carrying the reader away from an orientation which has proved inadequate towards a more adequate perspective. But in the final paragraphs of Part I of the *Hartwell Paper*, the *movement* metaphor becomes instead a vehicle for imaginatively reconstructing the entire framework for climate policy. Here is the extended analogy:

> If one seeks long-lasting impact, the best line of approach may not be head-on. "Lose the object and draw nigh obliquely" is a dictum attributed to the famous eighteenth century English landscape gardener Lancelot "Capability" Brown. Brown's designs framed the stately home at the entrance, but only briefly. After allowing the visitor a

> glimpse of his destination, the driveway would veer away to pass circuitously and delightfully through woodland vistas, through broad meadows with carefully staged apercus of waterfalls and temples, across imposing bridges spanning dammed streams and lakes, before delivering the visitor in a relaxed and amused frame of mind, unexpectedly, right in front of the house. That displays a subtle skill which has manifest political value: the capacity to deliver an ambitious objective harmoniously. "Capability" Brown might be a useful tutor for designers of climate policies. (p. 9)

Policy whitepapers are utilitarian documents, produced (and forgotten) quickly. So the grace and craftsmanship of this passage are even more striking. Consider the long quasi-periodic sentence in the middle of the paragraph. Like a garden by "Capability" Brown, it wanders through some elegant phrases before depositing the reader, in a relaxed and amused frame of mind, unexpectedly, at the main point. The sentence verbally enacts (Leff, 2003) the perspective of one approaching an English country house—the same perspective the authors invite readers to take on climate policy.

This linking of the design of climate policy to the design of English landscape gardens is referred to repeatedly in the rest of the *Hartwell Paper*. "Drawing nigh obliquely" becomes the motto for the inverted, re-framed approach to climate policy. Instead of proceeding headlong to the goal of decarbonization, the authors urge a more relaxed and enjoyable course that will eventually land us "right in front of" a world worth living in. In a subtle way, this "radical" perspective is implicit in the title of the *Paper* and its cover image (Figure 1): for the garden of the Hartwell House was designed by a follower of "Capability" Brown, and a map of the estate shows the remnants of an "oblique" approach (History, n.d.).[4]

I have catalogued three strategies for creating the conditions or argumentative polylogue, none of which involve arguing for such polylogue: "pointing out," narrative (barely touched here), and metaphor/analogy. At the oral presentation of this paper, Tony Blair remarked that these tools perhaps begin the study of a new aspect of argumentation—non-argument. I didn't respond adequately, astonished that the subject could be taken as new. Let me try to do better now.

"Argumentation [is] a self-regulating activity," Scott Jacobs (2000) declared; it is up to arguers to achieve the normative, epistemic and pragmatic preconditions for making arguments. This means that theorists of argumentation need to pay attention not only to arguments but to all the other discourse that makes arguments possible—what I have elsewhere termed "argument-plus" (Goodwin, 2000).

The three non-argument strategies catalogued can all be joined under the heading of *evocation*. Aristotle was probably not the first to notice that sometimes it isn't argument that is needed, but perception (*Top*. 1.11). If nothing else, arguments must start from points that are not themselves argued. "Even the most rationalistic of thinkers cannot argue demonstratively for everything, 'all the way down,'" Nicholas Rescher explained; "at some point a philosopher [or any arguer] must invite assent through an appeal to sympathetic acquiescence based on experience as such" (1998, p. 322). More broadly, in the view elaborated by Michael Leff in his OSSA and ISSA keynote addresses nearly twenty years ago, evocative discourse can actualize not only starting-points but all the conditions for argument in a complex, disagreement-filled world. Drawing on culturally resonant prototypes,

[4] Am I over-reading—was it just by chance that the image of the Hartwell House appeared on a paper referencing "Capability" Brown? The previous whitepaper *The Wrong Trousers* (Prins & Rayner, 2007), had attacked the Kyoto Protocol approach with a similar discussion of "draw nigh obliquely," linking it in that case to the zen-inspired design of a temple in—yes, Kyoto. And the cover image of *How to Get Climate Policy Back on Course* (Prins et al., 2009) was the famous Japanese woodprint of a giant wave seeming to swamp a small boat. These authors are not ones to leave allusions to chance.

evocation serves to "open situations to reasoned argument" (Leff, 2000, p. 252). Using terminology reminiscent of that in the *Hartwell Paper,* Leff explains that evocation "reframes or restructures perception of a situation" by summoning a new "recognition of the [it]…as an integral whole" through "the power of the language used in the persuasive effort" (Leff, 2003, p. 676).

While Leff, as was his wont, provided an account of evocation that emphasized its unifying and synthesizing aspects, Henry W. Johnstone, as was *his* wont (Goodwin, 2001), offered a more sober view. For communication of any kind to occur, discourse must first drive a "wedge between a person and the data of his immediate experience" (2007, p. 24). This wedge attacks "unconsciousness in all its forms: unawareness, naive acceptance, shortsightedness, complacency, blind confidence, unquestioning conformity to habits of thought and action" (p. 24). What is evoked for Johnstone is thus less a new world of shared meanings than a new consciousness alienated from what was formerly taken for granted. Constellated standpoints represent just such taken-for-granted material in civic controversies. To argue for a novel constellation requires first acknowledgement that it is arguable. And that requires driving a sharp wedge.

Leff, Rescher and Johnstone all place evocation within the province of rhetoric. I am less concerned with assigning disciplinary responsibilities. A key task in argumentation theory is to account for how arguments can get made. In this paper, I have considered the challenges faced by arguers in a world where standpoints have become locked into large-scale constellations, shutting down potential polylogues. How can polylogues get started?—what does it take to gain a hearing for a novel constellation? Arguing for the need to listen to arguments is, I have suggested, sometimes imprudent. Arguers thus have developed other strategies in order to wedge open minds and call forth new framings of a situation. The skilled authors of the *Hartwell Paper* have shown us some ways such evocation can be accomplished: by "pointing out" the manifest, inarguable failure of current perspectives, by synthesizing facts into a narrative, and by metaphors which invite imaginative reconstruction of the world. Two of these strategies—narrative and metaphor—have received attention from argumentation theorists who have considered what would happen if we treated them "as argument." The case study I have developed here shows the fruitfulness of an alternative approach. "Pointing out," narrative, and metaphor are worthwhile; worthwhile sometimes because they are not arguments.

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