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# Dialectic of/for agitation? Rethinking argumentative virtues in *Proletarian Elocution*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores the possible rapprochement between Marxism and argumentation attempted in *Proletarian Elocution*, a 1930 Japanese publication. Against a Western Marxist commonplace that “[a]s far as rhetoric is concerned,... a Marxist must be in a certain sense a Platonist” (Eagleton, 1981), the paper discusses how this work seeks to take advantage of the inquiry and advocacy dimensions of argumentation for the Marxian strategy of “agitprop” and rearticulate it as part of civic virtues.

**KEYWORDS:** advocacy, agitation, elocution, inquiry, Japan, logic, Marxism, proletariat, propaganda, rhetoric

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Proletarian Elocution* is a 1930 Japanese-language publication by Eizo Kondo (1883-1965), a prominent Marxist intellectual at the time and a founding member of the Central Committee of the Japan Communist Party. Consisting of seven chapters (and two appendices) that delineate the basic principles of public speaking, it is a practical handbook that should deserve our scholarly attention. First, as the title should suggest, the chief aim of *Proletarian Elocution* is to teach effective speech-making to (would-be) “orator communists/communist orators” (Greene, 2004; 2006), i.e., the political activists who seek Communist revolution by way of discourse. The work was published in the heyday of communist and socialist movements, the time when Marxism, in the words of Masao Maruyama, “[swept] through the Japanese intelligentsia like a whirlwind” (quoted in Goto-Jones, 2006, p.5) and “it would have been hard to find an intellectual who did not broadly agree with Marx’s basic diagnosis of the problems of capitalist society” (Goto-Jones, 2006, p.5). As such, the historical significance of this Japanese speech handbook may be comparable to its Euro-Marxian contemporaries such as Eduard David’s *Referenten Führer* and Angelica Balabanoff’s *Erziehung der Massen zum Marxismus, Psychologisch-Pädagogische Betrachtungen* (cf., Wilkie, 1968; 1974; 1981).

Second and perhaps more importantly, *Proletarian Elocution* is not a speech handbook that merely combines Marxism and public speaking; it is also an ambitious attempt to establish argumentation as a branch of the Marxian politico-cultural practice by incorporating rhetoric (the study of affect-oriented mass

persuasion) and logic (the method of truth-oriented discursive inquiry). For communist orators, the study of rhetoric and logic is not an end in itself but is rather a means to an end. “To master elocution assumes that one already knows logic and rhetoric, two bodies of considerably complex expert knowledge. From a proletarian perspective, this author tries to explain the principles and rules in these disciplines as plainly as possible” (Kondo, 1930, p.3).<sup>1</sup> Challenging both the Western Marxist commonplace that “[a]s far as rhetoric is concerned,... a Marxist must be in a certain sense a Platonist” (Eagleton, 1981, p.113) and the “left intellectuals engaging only in radical critique” (Aune, 1994, p.3), the work suggests that we should fully exploit the “inferential (rational/demonstrative)” and “evocative (rhetorical)” functions of persuasive discourse (Rescher, 1998) and calls for the (re)unison of the “inquiry” and “advocacy” dimensions (Ziegelmueller and Kay, 1997) of argumentation. And Kondo attempted to do this all, rather ambitiously, in the name of proletarian elocution.

In the spirit of the Conference Theme, i.e., “Virtues of Argumentation,” the purpose of this paper is to explore the idea of argumentative virtues in *Proletarian Elocution*, the work of Kondo’s Marxist ambition. As a fuller and more detailed and comprehensive treatment of the work is hoped to come later, what I will do in what follows is preliminary and largely descriptive. Focusing mainly on the first three chapters (i.e., Introduction, The Basic Theoretical Foundation, and The Study of Logic from the Proletarian Perspective), my exploration will explicate in what way the author takes advantage of the dual dimension. i.e., inquiry and advocacy, of argumentation for serving politically-enabling oratory and rearticulates it as part of civic virtues (cf., Hirschkind, 2001). To this end, the paper first takes a look at the idea of Marxian agitation, i.e., the basic tenet of Kondo’s proletarian elocution, and discusses the role assigned for argumentation to play therein. The paper then turns to problems of “invention” and of the discovery of truth in Marxist oratory and describes how Kondo explains, in the “plain” language of the proletariat, the method of logic and logical inference appropriate for proletarian elocution. The final section of the paper will summarize this descriptive study and calls for more scholarly discussion on this obscure Japanese work.

## 2. AGITATION, PROPAGANDA, AND ARGUMENTATION

### 2.1. Oratory as the proletarian art

*Proletarian Elocution* is a speech handbook written for the unique and distinct political end. As such, its first two chapters are spent on the definition, nature and justification of the subject its exclusively deals with, i.e., the study of proletarian elocution. Posing a rhetorical question, “Is there such a thing that we can specially call proletarian elocution?” (Kondo, 1930, p.3) at the outset, the author begins his first lesson to his comrades in the Introduction section: Speech-making is a kind of art and that oratory is a product of artistic creation. Using analogies of a good

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all the English translation of the Japanese materials included herein is mine.

painter drawing a beautiful painting and a singer with her/his beautiful voice to impress and move people, he writes that those who are adept at elocution can do the same. That is, devising their oratorical skills, they can create arts that communicate messages and change ways in which the people think and act by appealing to their minds and hearts.

Not all arts are created equal, however, as the readers are warned that there are two distinct types of art. And Kondo suggests that they make sure not to confuse these two. On the one hand, there is the “bourgeois” art whose purpose “is to eradicate the class consciousness among the proletarian mass. That is, it conspires to suppress our class-based anger in the name of expressing ‘beauty’” (Kondo, 1930, p.7). The other, called the “proletarian” art, “revolts against this very deceit. The more the work fuels the class-based anger, the better it becomes; the stronger impact the work provides to ignites the mass consciousness, the greater its artistic quality becomes”(p.7).

One type of art is conspiring and deceptive, whereas the other checks the deception and conspiracy and evokes the class-based anger. For the proletariat, this distinction is of extreme significance whenever they are engaged in the artistic creation and appreciation, which should override any aesthetic concerns. As a piece of art, of course, oratory is no exception.

The quality of proletarian elocution is assessed in accordance with the magnitude of such [agitating] impact it generates.... Proletarian elocution refuses any and all of the [bourgeois] deceit. It is a logical expansion of the proletarian truth where the exhibition of a powerful expression of the proletarian class consciousness suffices. Proletarian elocution is fundamentally different from, and diametrically opposes, bourgeois elocution. (Kondo, 1930, pp.7-8)

Namely, as a virtuous art, proletarian elocution is the one that is grounded in, and arouses, the class-based mass consciousness; as such, it can acquire the valuable quality only when it is distinctively proletarian.

## *2.2. Agitprop as argumentation*

Having thus established the basic foundation, Kondo moves on and offers his next lesson: the Marxian strategy of agitation and propaganda or “agitprop.” Going through the passages in Lenin’s *What is To Be Done*, he suggests that communist orators distinguish between propaganda and agitation, just as they do so between the bourgeois and proletarian arts: The former is the sphere of dialectical discourse that involves a theoretical and systematic explication of complex social phenomena among a relatively smaller number of generally informed and more or less committed individuals; the latter has to do with a discourse of “public/mass” communication that aims at the promulgation of a simple and single idea to a large number of lesser- or un-informed people.

Unlike the one between the bourgeois and proletarian arts, however, this distinction is not about the quality of persuasive discourse. Rather, it is just “a matter of degree,” for any “fiery eloquence or declamation,” proletarian or otherwise, “does involve agitation” and “[i]n reality, the overall value of eloquence is

determined by how agitating it is” (Kondo, 1930, p.14). This is particularly crucial in case of proletarian elocution, for Kondo finds, as Aune (1994) does in the West, the “rhetorical problem” in the Japanese Marxism. And it is at this point that his teaching of the agitprop turns argumentative and “Greco-Roman.”

In the first place, Kondo reminds his readers of the significance of rhetoric, i.e., argumentation’s “advocacy” dimension that involves “using language strategies to justify our beliefs and actions to others” (Ziegelmüller and Kay, 1997, p.6). Specifically, he suggests his comrades not to fear its agitating power: “Fear of agitation comes from [censored]<sup>2</sup> consciousness. As the exploited class, the proletariat should rise above this bourgeois consciousness and correctly grasp the truth”(Kondo, 1930, p.14). He further notes that proletarian advocacy should be more rhetorically sensitive, calling for the more audience adaptation and the more audience-friendly use of language on their part. He even insists that, “[t]o articulate the collective consciousness of the mass with direct action,” proletarian oratory “must not contain such circumlocutory [Marxist] theory that the mass have to think over in order to comprehend” (p.16).

At the same time, Kondo’s proletarian elocution does secure the place for propaganda, the domain of dialectical discourse that “explicates proletarian philosophy, theoretically analyzes and criticizes the bourgeois society and politics” (Kondo, 1930, p.17). Proletarian oratory must not be a “mere rhetoric” of demagoguery. While its advocacy should be agitating, the content of the discourse should be based on, and reflexive of, the Marxian social analysis and the proletarian truth. To this end, he instructs his readers not to forget “inquiry,” the other dimension of argumentation that involves “discovering and applying the general standards for determining what is true or reasonable” (Ziegelmüller and Kay, 1997, p.5). Namely, very much sounding Aristotelian or Ciceronian, Kondo understands and tells his comrades that, by way of propaganda, the Marxism-informed inquiry helps the rhetorical “invention” in proletarian elocution. In addition, propaganda also performs a significant pedagogical function for would-be communist orators. As a theoretic-analytic dialectic that “aims at nurturing the proletarian class warriors and [censored] the mass class consciousness,” it constitutes significant “part of the process that prepares” (p.17) them before they actually take to the streets and deliver their agitating discourse.

### 3. LOGIC, INFERENCE, AND MATERIAL TRUTH

#### *3.1. Proletarian logic made easy*

Having indoctrinated his comrades into the study of proletarian elocution in the first two chapters, in the third chapter titled “The Study of Logic from the Proletarian Perspective,” Kondo (1930) moves onto what is taken to be the heart of his teaching: the nature of “rhetorical proof” appropriate for the discourse of the Marxian

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<sup>2</sup>Typical of a dissident work published in Japan during this period, *Proletarian Elocution* was subjected to the censorship by the public authorities as it contains a number of “blanks” printed therein.

agitation. For this, he warns his readers that, for the purpose of rhetorical invention, Marxist theory and Marxism-informed social analysis alone are unfortunately insufficient; they must be supplemented by the disciplinary knowledge of logic, “one of the basic sciences for the study of elocution” (p.48). First, quite simply, any kind of oratory “must have a clear logic” (p.48) in order to be effective and persuasive. Second, by studying logic, communist orators can avoid committing logical fallacy themselves or can detect it in others’ discourse. “If you know nothing about logic,” writes Kondo, “your discourse becomes haphazard and random and you always risk yourself falling in a logical pitfall” (p.48).

At the same time, Kondo is sympathetic to his comrades who dislike logic or find it overwhelming. After all, logic is an extremely erudite subject that seems “considerably demanding, quibbling, and abstract” hence “it is reasonable for the proletariat who try to make ends meet everyday to regard that discipline as remote and far less interesting” (p.47). Provided that logic is the study that “explores the forms and principles of thinking in order to establish the norms that should be secured for the acquisition of true knowledge” (p.49) for politically-enabling argumentation, however, he also recognizes that he cannot ignore and bypass logic in his teaching of oratory.

To solve this, Kondo is clever and strategic enough to deploy a set of teaching approaches. First, he declares that his *Proletarian Elocution* only deals with and make reference to the basics of logic “only when we find it helpful for our chief aim, namely the study of proletarian elocution” (p.48). Second and more interestingly, to make it more accessible, comprehensible, and specific, he writes about and explains the essence of logic in the language of his proletarian readers and by providing examples familiar to the working people.

So staged, the first logic lesson in *Proletarian Elocution* deals with the four “Laws of Thought” that constitute the fundamental principles of logic, i.e., Laws of Identity, of Contradiction, of Excluded Middle, and of Sufficient Reason. Devising the language of the working class, Kondo explains each of these Laws in the first several pages in the third chapter. In one sub-section titled “The Principle of Thinking,” he begins the lesson with Law of Identity, saying

Imagine the following two propositions or judgments:

“He is a worker.”

“I am a worker, too.”

In the both cases above, the concept of “worker” is identical. That is, while “he” and “I” are different, they are identical as both are “workers.” This year’s “he” is not the same as the previous year’s as his life conditions may be somehow different. Yet, “he” is consistently a worker in principle as “he” has been engaged in miserable wage labor. By the same token, “I” in the above may have changed jobs several times since last year. Yet, unable to escape from the status of wage slave, “I” am still no less a worker than “he” is. This way, law of identity is a way of thinking that seeks to recognize permanence in change, regularity in variety, and commonality within difference. (pp. 50-51)

Moving on, Kondo then explicates Law of Sufficient Reason, another fundamental principle of logic that expresses that nothing exists without a reason or that all that exist have their own sufficient ground. Again, in the way that he hopes his readers to

find it more understandable and accessible, he explains the intricate concept of that Law:

To say, “The emergence of the proletarian class is due to the advancement of capitalist mode of production” is to explain what is known (the emergence of the proletarian class) by giving the reason (the advancement of capitalist mode of production). Just as the law of causation does in the sphere of Nature, the law of sufficient reason demonstrates the relationship between these two phenomena. (p.52-53).

### *3.2. Deduction and induction*

Completing the first lesson, Kondo continues his teaching of basic logic. In the next sub-section titled “Syllogism,” the author provides his readers with the basic principles of logical inference. First, he offers a detailed explication of the nature of deductive reasoning in length, whereby he introduces the three major types of syllogism: Categorical syllogism, conditional syllogism, and disjunctive syllogism. And in an effort to explain each as plainly as possible to his comrades, he once again takes advantage of the language and examples largely shared among the working class and the proletariat.

[Categorical syllogism:]

[Major premise:] “The proletariat have the class consciousness.”

[Minor premise:] “We are the proletariat.”

[Conclusion:] “Therefore, we have the class consciousness.” (p.66)

[Major premise:] “Workers are wage slaves.”

[Minor premise:] “He is a worker.”

[Conclusion:] “Therefore, he is a wage slave.” (p.68)

[Conditional syllogism:]

[Major premise:] “If one is a true labor activist, s/he must be highly-spirited with a full of the class consciousness.”

[Minor premise:] “If one betrays her/his comrades, s/he is not highly-spirited with a full of the class consciousness.”

[Conclusion:] “Therefore, if one betrays her/his comrades, s/he is not a true labor activist.” (pp.75-6)

Regarding inductive reasoning, however, Kondo’s logic lesson suddenly turns distinctively proletarian, argument-theoretic, and dialectically materialist. It is due not only to the language or examples he employs to explain induction but it is rather in terms of the substance and theory used to elaborate the concept. In the sub-section titled “Inductive Inference and Analogy,” Kondo first writes to his readers that, just as the one between propaganda and agitation or between advocacy and inquiry, there is a division of labor between induction and deduction. Whereas the former is the inference concerned with inquiry, the latter concerned with proof and demonstration. And provided that deduction is considered “formal inference” which is to be served by induction, the lesser or non-formal logical inference, observes Kondo (1930), “the study of elocution has hitherto emphasized deductive inference

only” (p.86).

From the proletarian perspective, however, this is very troubling and disturbing, if not untenable. First, his readers are reminded that they live in a society where “we can easily observe the fabrication of the principles and the patronization of science that contributes to the feigned eternity of capitalism” (p. 86). Namely, many of the conventions and principles that they generally accept as true and self-evident in the presently existing capitalist society are far from true hence “we cannot uncritically take them as our logical base” (p. 86) for deduction. In other words, for the purpose of proletarian elocution, deduction is of less utility; induction is in fact the superior and more valuable form of logical inference. As a method of “material inference” (p.86), induction is the mode of inquiry that checks the material truth of promises in deduction as well as provides genuinely true materials to it. Hence he suggests that communist orators reverse the relationship between induction and deduction and engage the task of inquiry before attempting to deduce the conclusion from the already given premises.

In addition, Kondo instructs his reader to recognize that, as long as they live in capitalism, “there would be more instances that necessitate inductive inference” (p.86) when it comes to argumentation. And to engage in the task of such inferential inquiry, what they need is not only the knowledge of logic but also the theory and praxis of the proletariat, namely historical materialism of Marxism. As Kondo concludes:

First and foremost, we should go back to our own experience as the proletariat. More often than not, that is how and where we should start and extend [our logical inference] inductively... [T]he significant assumption that constitutes the basis for our inductive inference must be the judgment provided by dialectical materialism. (p. 87)

While his logic lesson itself ends in the third chapter where he discusses the rhetorical invention, Kondo repeatedly goes back and refers to the need for this Marxian dialectic of theory-praxis merger for proletarian argumentation later in the work, albeit in different contexts. In the chapter that deals with another Greco-Roman rhetorical canon of “delivery,” for instance, he writes to his readers:

As long as the bourgeois ethics is concerned, what is referred as a “common sense” is anti-proletarian.... Proletarian elocution seeks to break down that “common sense” of the bourgeois society and to establish the class consciousness, i.e., “our own common sense” grounded in the proletarian consciousness. Namely, whereas bourgeois orators profess that we should make observation based on their “common sense,” proletarian elocution warns that it is the class consciousness that should become the basis for observation. (p. 155)

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

According to Collier’s *Socialist Reasoning* (1990), “The vast majority of political actions consist of argument (and other verbal practices).... [T]he vast majority of demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience, token strikes... are really not so much ‘direct action’ as indirect ways of saying something” (p.xi). In this paper, the attempt

has been made to explore what such argument should possibly look like by taking a look at Kondo's *Proletarian Elocution*, a Marxian handbook for effective speech-making. While preliminary and limited in scope, I hope the descriptive analysis that preceded makes a modest contribution to our better and more informed discussion on the working of argumentation and rhetoric in the Marxist discursive politics.

First, according to Kondo's teaching, communist orators can overcome Marxism's "rhetorical problem" and make their strategy of agitprop more effective by taking advantage of the inquiry and advocacy dimension of argumentation. Second, being consistent with the Greco-Roman teaching of rhetoric, logic is an important component for "invention" in the Marxian speech-making as well as for the education of communist orators. Lastly but not in the least, as the method of material inference, induction is the superior and more appropriate mode of proof for proletarian oratory.

In closing, I would just like to call for more studies on *Proletarian Elocution*. Just as its predecessor in late 19th century Japan (cf., Branham, 1994; Gaikotsu, 1929), this little work of the dissident should deserve more historically grounded scrutiny and more rigorous scholarly treatment, to say the least. It is indeed unfortunate that scholars of rhetoric and argument have long ignored Kondo's ambitious Marxian project. Writing about the Japanese tradition of dissident rhetoric, for instance, Hatano (1968) overlooked this 1930 handbook and erroneously lamented, "Oratory was yet to find its distinct position within Marxist propaganda in the Inaugural Year of Showa [1926], i.e., the time when the nation's political consciousness aroused extremely high" (p. 1469). In Tomasi's *Rhetoric in Modern Japan* (2004), perhaps the most comprehensive history of modern Japanese rhetoric currently available in English language, there is no mentioning of *Proletarian Elocution* or any other practices of Marxism-informed dissident oratory. By the same token, *Proletarian Elocution* has been given insufficient, if not no, attention in the field of modern Japanese history. Oscillating between the Bolshevik and the anarchist camps, Kondo himself is in fact an interesting and controversial Marxist figure hence is featured in the literature on the history of Japanese Marxism and communism (cf., Beckman and Okubo, 1969; Totten, 1966; Yamauchi, 2004, 2010). Curiously enough, however, his *Proletarian Elocution* is not discussed in any of these studies; there is no mentioning of this work even in the compilation of his biographical materials including his own memoirs (cf., Doshisha University Research Institute for the Humanities, 1970).

In his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* ([1880]), Engels lamented that the "kingdom of reason," a product of the 18th-century French Revolution, had become "nothing more than the idealized kingdom of the bourgeoisie." As "the social and political institutions born of the 'triumph of reason' were bitterly disappointing caricatures," he continued,

The state based upon reason completely collapsed.... The antagonism between rich and poor, instead of dissolving into general prosperity, had become intensified by the removal of the guild and other privileges.... The development of industry upon a capitalistic basis made poverty and misery of the working masses conditions of existence of society.... Trade became to a greater and greater extent cheating.... Oppression by force was replaced by corruption; the sword, as the first social lever,

by gold. The right of the first knight was transferred from the feudal lords to the bourgeois manufacturers.

What *Proletarian Elocution* teaches is the virtue of rhetorical argumentation. As an effort to provide a corrective to the corruption of reason by capitalism, it attempts to restore critical reasoning and help the proletariat build their own kingdom of reason by incorporating logic, rhetoric and material truth informed by the Marxian social analysis. As Cicero ([1888]) once wrote, “[V]irtue has embraced all things under one meaning and one name; for virtue is a habit of the mind, consistent with nature, and moderation, and reason.”

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SATORU AONUMA

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