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Fred J. Kauffeld  
*Edgewood College, Communication Studies*

Beth Innocenti  
*University of Kansas*

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Inducing a Sympathetic (Empathic) Reception for Exhortation

FRED KAUFFELD
Communication Studies Department
Edgewood College
Madison, WI 53711
USA
chris_fred@att.net

BETH INNOCENTI
Communication Studies Department
University of Kansas
Bailey Hall, Room 102
1440 Jayhawk Blvd.
Lawrence, KS 66045
USA
bimanole@ku.edu

Abstract: This essay explores ways arguers can afford potentially unsympathetic addressees good reason to empathetically entertain exhortative discourse. First, we illuminate the essential structure and underlying constitutive pragmatics of exhortation. Second, we show that the persuasive force of Lincoln’s Cooper Union Address derives from his use of exhortation. By doing so we add to recent scholarship that accounts for the persuasive force of civically significant speech acts.

Keywords: Abraham Lincoln, Cooper Union Address, Exhorting, H.P. Grice, Sympathetic Hearing

1. Introduction

The speech act of exhorting and its product, the exhortation, merit serious attention from students of argumentation. This point may not be obvious because exhortation has components which can seem to reach beyond the scope of strictly reasoned discourse. As we argue below, an attempt to inspire commitment and/or action is an essential component in exhortation. This facet might be thought to place exhorting more in the domain of the sermonic discourse and outside the cognitively circumscribed scope of argumentation. Such allocation, we maintain, would be mistaken. The pragmatics of exhortation requires the presentation of reasons within an identifiable argumentative structure. Moreover, in favorable circumstances, exhortation affords means for muster reasons capable of overcoming complacent/confused reluctance to undertake the strenuous action sometimes required by high-minded principles and/or aspirations. Accordingly, students of argumentation from both dialectical and rhetorical traditions ought to attend carefully to the nature and dynamic of components which can seem to reach beyond the scope of strictly reasoned discourse.

Our aims in this study are twofold. First, we intend to illuminate the essential structure and underlying constitutive pragmatics of exhortation, with special attention to exhortations designed to strengthen addressees’ resolve to act as required by their high-minded principles. Second, we attempt to explicate the structure and persuasive force which Abraham Lincoln’s argument in his Cooper Union Address derives from his use of exhortation. By doing so we aim to add to recent scholarship that accounts for the persuasive force of civically significant speech acts including proposing and accusing (Kauffeld, 1998), testimony (Kauffeld & Fields, 2005),
expertise (Goodwin, 2011), and fear appeals (Innocenti, 2011). We begin with an analysis of exhorting and then explicate the contribution exhorting makes to the structure and persuasive force of Lincoln’s Cooper Union Address.

2. The conceptual and pragmatic structure of exhorting

We offer an account of exhorting informed by Grice’s analysis of utterance meaning as elaborated by P.F. Strawson, Dennis Stampe, and a subsequently well-developed literature on the normative structure of acts performed in and by saying something (Stampe, 1967; Strawson, 1964). We begin with a broad discussion of the pragmatic contexts which call forth exhortation; we then turn to an analysis of our concept of this illocutionary act; finally we take up an account of the pragmatics of the paradigm performance which underlies and constitutes our understanding of this illocutionary act.

Exhortations typically respond to situations which are marked by problems of conflicted principles. These problems arise where some agent or agents believe that an extra-ordinary effort on their part and/or the part of their fellows is required to discharge the obligations imposed by their paramount principles and/or their highest aspirations. It may be that these obligations are not clearly apprehended by relevant agents; it may be that the effort required is not fully appreciated; it may be that principles or aspirations involve conflicts with other paramount principles and/or higher aspirations; or it may seem that the effort required runs counter to the relevant agents’ perceived self-interest. In these and related contexts, a speaker may have good reason to try to elevate her associates’ commitment to strenuous action. While the conflicts and tensions which inhibit action mandated by overriding considerations are numerous and variable, they pose recurrent and similar practical problems for speakers who would elicit elevated endeavor from “troubled” addressees. Exhortation affords the speaker a mode of discourse which may serve to clarify and uplift her addressee’s commitment to extraordinary resolve and exertion.

Exhortations can be found in many situations. They occur in locker room “pep talks,” graduation ceremonies, inauguration events, dedications, sermons, parental encouragement, and so on. But, perhaps, the exhortations of greatest interest occur in connection with democratic civic discourse and in other settings in which decision-making rests in hands of parties who can claim equality of rights to participation. Such decision-making bodies occasionally encounter challenges and problems the resolution of which requires extraordinary (often) unwelcome exertion on the part of members. In such situations the decision-making body needs leadership which has a capacity to urge and inspire members to live up to and fulfill the obligations imposed on them by their fundamental commitments (Krause, 2002, pp. 11-12, 108-109). Referring here to an example discussed below, questions regarding the status and potential spread of slavery in mid-nineteenth-century America posed such challenges to parties who saw its continuation as an abridgement of the country’s fundamental commitment to universal freedom. Resolution of those challenges required effective leadership on the part of Abraham Lincoln and his fellows committed to opposing the spread and perpetual existence of slavery. As we will see below, persuasive exhortation played a significant role in Lincoln’s cause. Nor is this “episode,” though extraordinary in its proportions, without significant parallels in the history of democratic institutions (Krause, 2002). The capacity of exhortation to bring reason-giving discourse to bear on urging and inspiring democratic decision-making renders this communicative act deserving of considerably more attention than it has received from students.
of argumentation. Analysis of the conceptual structure of exhorting and reflection on its underlying pragmatic design will disclose the strategic potential of exhortation.

Our account of exhorting unfolds along the lines of a relatively well-established procedure for explicating speech acts of this kind. Exhorting belongs to a large family of speech acts identified by J. L. Austin as “illocutionary acts,” acts performed in and by saying something. As we will shortly see, much as in the case of promising where a speaker must say that she will do whatever it is that she promises to do (or something semantically equivalent to this utterance), so there is a specifiable range of things a speaker must say in order for her communicative act to qualify as exhorting. In addition to this central utterance core, exhorting requires that a speaker openly undertake certain further commitments designed to underwrite a favorable relationship with her addressee(s). These are observations regarding our concept of exhorting, but as we do commonly rely upon that concept to truthfully identify and report instances of exhorting, we may reasonably suppose that the components of this speech act which emerge as conceptually essential are also pragmatically fundamental to potentially efficacious efforts to exhort. Accordingly our account will begin with analysis of our concept of exhorting and then move to discussion of how the conceptually essential components of this speech act figure in potentially efficacious performances.

Based on a Gricean analysis of utterance-meaning, we argue that the core of exhorting consists in three essential components: (1) making statements openly designed to urge auditors to develop high-minded commitments to matters of right, duty, and the like; and (2) manifestly speaking with the intention of inspiring a concomitant resolve to act on those commitments. And (3) there is this further component to our conception (and practice) of exhorting: the exhorter speaks with (or at least appears to) speak with the intention that her addressee’s recognition of the speaker’s open intention to urge the addressee to act and correspondingly to inspire the addressee’s performance is to provide the addressee with reason to grant a sympathetic hearing to what the speaker has to say.

It is relatively easy to see that these first two components are not only characteristic of exhorting, but are also necessary components of our conception of this speech act, i.e., we would be reluctant (perhaps unwilling) to identify a communicative performance as an instance of exhorting if it did not contain some version of each of these components.

Consider first, the statement urging the addressee to develop a paramount commitment to specific matters of right, duty, benevolence, excellence, and the like. We refer to this as the “exhorter’s call to principled action.” To issue such a call, the exhorter (SE) must at a minimum say that her addressee (AE) is to do x, where x is presented as an act, course of action, policy, etc. required by AE’s paramount obligations and/or aspirations. The exhorter necessarily speaks in the imperative. While the exhorter is expected to and is, as we will see, committed to having reasons for why AE is to do x, these are not to be merely reasons why AE should do x; they are, rather, to be reasons why AE must do x, is called upon to do x, required as a matter of right, duty, etc. This point is reflected in properties of the exhortative utterance. Notice first that to produce an exhortation, SE must come out and say that AE is to do x. One may implicate things by making an exhortation, but one cannot exhort by merely implicating that AE is to do x. Someone who said ‘I think you should do x’, ‘Perhaps you should do x’, ‘It could be that you are to x,’ could hardly be described as exhorting AE to do x. Similarly, it would be odd to say *‘I exhort you to respect persons of all spiritual orientations, but mind you I am not saying that you are to do that’. In this vein, it is important to notice that we cannot coherently purport to exhort persons to perform actions which are despicable, disreputable, unprincipled, less than high-minded, or
below their best level of performance. Utterances on the order of *‘I exhort you to get thoroughly drunk’, *‘I exhort you to ignore the speed limit here’, and even *‘I exhort you to play well’ seem odd because the course of action commended is not principled and/or does not rise to an aspirational level which warrants exhortation. In short, if SE’s utterance is to serve as an essential component in an exhortation, SE must at a minimum say that AE is to do x, where x is some high-minded course of action required of AE on a principled and/or aspirational basis. Of course, in very many cases SE will find it necessary to say more than this by way of her call to action.

Notice that to exhort some party, a speaker must do more than issue a call to perform that action. That call by itself amounts to little more than urging the addressee to do x. Accordingly, one might urge another to do x by saying, e.g., ‘It is clear that you are to do x; now whether you actually bring yourself to do it is entirely up to you’. However, by itself, this utterance would not qualify as an exhortation. It would be odd to say something on the order of *‘I exhort you to do x; whether you actually bring yourself to do x is entirely up to you’. Exhortation involves more than simply urging the addressee to do x. This point can also be grasped by noticing that the utterance ‘do x (high-minded)’ could be an order, imperative and advice, etc. What then is missing from our analysis of exhorting?

In addition to urging AE to do x (high-minded), exhortation requires a larger manifest effort to inspire AE to act on his commitment to do x. More specifically, an utterance qualifies as exhortation only if the exhorter speaks with the further manifest intention to draw forth, elicit or arouse an intentional/affective orientation corresponding to her call to action. Such orientations range over an array of possibilities such as alertness, resolve, vigorous, energetic, cautious, courageous, compassionate, strenuous, etc. High-minded courses of action may require one or more companion intentional orientations. Thus, one might resolutely pursue a graduate degree, cautiously approach driving in a winter storm, and so on. Notice that these orientations variously admit of degrees. One may undertake a given course resolved to see it through, but one may undertake that course firmly resolved to complete it. Likewise, one may approach a matter cautiously, or one may be extremely cautious. The fact that these intentional/affective orientations may vary in the degree to which each is operative opens the possibility that, with respect to each, one may be inspired. Inspiration may be a complicated and in some respects a mysterious matter, but it always involves a heightening or elevation of some kind. Thus what one person says to another (and perhaps the manner in which that person speaks) can inspire the addressee to produce a highly energetic and/or vigorous performance. It is part of our conception of exhortation that the speaker not only issues a call to action, but that she also manifestly intends to inspire her addressee to a high level of some corresponding intentional/affective orientation.

There is yet a further essential component in our conception of (and practice of) exhorting, viz., the exhorter speaks with (or at least appears to) speak with the intention that her addressees’ recognition of the speaker’s open intention to urge the addressee to act and her corresponding overt effort to inspire the addressee’s performance is to provide the addressee with reasons which elicit a sympathetic reception for what the speaker has to say. A sympathetic reception takes what the speaker has to say as issuing from a harmony of feeling existing between persons of like tastes, opinion, congenial dispositions, etc. Recall that we enjoy a sense of mutual fellowship with persons who we suppose share a connection of “blood, affection, or resemblance,” etc. (Frazer, 2010, p. 70). We do not necessarily agree with such persons in all or critical respects, but we do suppose that such persons respect, appreciate, and value events,
experiences, performances, etc. which we favorably value. With such persons we enjoy congenial discourses—discourses which are mutually “suited or adapted in spirit, feeling, temper, etc.,” mutually compatible. The mark of a sympathetic hearing (following David Hume; Darwall, 2013, pp. 114-19) is that the addressee transforms ideas vividly articulated by the exhorter into sensible impressions (Frazer, 2010, p. 98). Exhortations are necessarily openly calculated to elicit a sympathetic hearing from their addressees.

Before taking up the pragmatics constituting our concept of this illocutionary act, we should comment on the sufficiency of the conditions laid out by our analysis. Does satisfaction of these conditions suffice to warrant identification of a communicative performance as an instance of exhorting? Notice in this connection that were a speaker to acknowledge that she is openly attempting to elicit a sympathetic hearing for utterances openly designed to urge and inspire her addressee to perform this high-minded course of action, we would regard as odd a denial on her part that she is exhorting her addressee to adopt that course of action. We might well accept such a denial from a speaker who is covertly trying to urge and inspire an addressee to execute such and such a course of action, but where a speaker openly speaks with such intentions she is transparently attempting to exhorte her addresses.

Now let us turn our attention to the pragmatics of exhorting, i.e., to the practical calculation which paradigmatically underlies and constitutes this illocutionary act. As noted above, exhorting typically comes into play in situations marked by conflicted principles, where the exhorter has reason to believe that her addressees may be loath (reluctant) to live up to their high-minded, principled commitments. No doubt such circumstances occur, though they may not be the normal stuff of our humdrum daily affairs (Krause, 2008, p. 101). In such circumstances a speaker may feel called upon to deliver an exhortation, which urges and is centrally designed to inspire her addressees to undertake the high-minded action which the speaker supposes their principles require. While this may not be the easiest discourse to execute, ample empirically available discourses attest to the potential efficacy of exhortation. We will examine one such discourse below.

We have argued on conceptual grounds that exhorting per se is essentially constituted by a calculation which aims to elicit a sympathetic hearing for the exhorter’s effort to urge and inspire high-minded action on the part of “hesitant addressees.” The question now is: Does this analytically-based conclusion afford a pragmatically coherent view of paradigmatic instances of this speech act, i.e. an account of how the means identified by our analysis enable a potentially efficacious and feasible solution to a practical problem exhorters characteristically face?

A speaker undertaking to exhort her addressees faces an initial practical problem, viz., how to secure an open-minded, favorable reception from her addressees. Recall first the practical necessity to secure such reception and then the potential difficulty inherent in the nature of exhorting to securing that response.

Our analysis of exhorting reveals that the intention to inspire a strong disposition to act on relevant principles is an essential component of our concept of this illocutionary act. Accordingly, we may reasonably suppose that an overt effort to inspire is a practically necessary component of attempts to exhort addresses. The possibility of inspiring addressees supposes a certain, let us say sympathetic, disposition on the part of addressees, an open receptivity to what the speaker has to say. Where addressees are inclined to turn a deaf ear to an exhorter’s utterance, the exhorter has little chance to inspire them.

In the circumstances which call forth exhortation, addressees may well be strongly disposed to disregard the exhorter’s discourse. Per our conjecture about the pragmatics of this
illocutionary act, exhortation is needed in situations where addressees are disposed to waver or otherwise be reluctant to act as their paramount commitments require. As noted earlier, this may be a matter of conflicts among the addressees’ principles or perceived conflicts between the principled course of action and the addressees’ self-interest or a lack of clarity on the addressees’ part of what is required of the addressees, etc. However that may be, it is highly likely that in many such cases of (potentially) discordant relations within an addressee’s paramount cognitive and affective commitments, the addressee will have adopted an interpretive framework which supports something on the order of a “reflective equilibrium” among these potentially discordant cognitive and affective states, which affords a certain peace of mind regarding inaction. Moreover, common sense and social psychology tell us that the addressee will in all likelihood be strongly disposed to maintain that more or less comfortable harmony. Here is the rub. The intentions with which the exhorter openly speaks manifestly portend an effort to disturb the existing equilibrium the addressee has achieved among the competing considerations. It is well known that an addressee can maintain that harmony in the face of the exhorter’s potentially disturbing effort to urge the addressee to commit to the high road by simply dismissing the speaker as a trouble maker, an extremist, etc. In this event the addressee may well turn a deaf (bemused, irritated) ear to the exhorter. Should that occur, the would-be exhorter could hardly expect to effectively urge, much less inspire, the addressee to commit to the “high-minded” course to which the exhorter is trying to direct the addressee’s commitments (O’Keefe, 1990).

We have, then, identified a practical problem with roots in the configuration of intentions which analysis gives us reason to believe mark a communicative act as “exhorting.” The pragmatically significant question now is: Can this problem be resolved by securing the initial response which analysis shows to be the openly identified aim of speakers performing this illocutionary act? That is, can a speaker resolve this problem by securing a “sympathetic hearing”? Other things being more or less equal, a sympathetic hearing would seem to preclude regarding the exhorter as an extremist crank.

Can an exhorter hope to secure such a hearing by use of such means as analysis shows are essential to the performance of this speech act? From a pragmatic perspective this is a critically important question. We know from experience that speakers attempting to exhort audiences do sometimes secure a sympathetic hearing. We can reasonably suppose that what is essential to our conception of this speech act will also, in favorable circumstances, be pragmatically sufficient to secure its initial objective. Given favorable circumstances, can a speaker then reasonably hope to induce a sympathetic hearing by manifestly intending to urge her addressee to attempt to fulfill high-minded commitments and by openly trying to inspire them to act, while making it apparent that she hopes to secure a sympathetic hearing on their part?

It is important to see just what this question does and does not involve. We have argued that exhortation affords an important means for bringing reluctant, wavering, confused, etc. addressees to undertake or, at least, more seriously commit to undertaking courses of action. However, the capacity of exhortation to achieve this larger objective utilizing the means minimally necessary to perform this illocutionary act is not immediately in question. To be sure under very favorable circumstances an exhortation using only those means minimally necessary to make it the case that A has exhorted B to do x will suffice to overcome B’s hesitation. It does sometimes happen that when speaking to someone who is indecisive when it comes to acting as his high-minded principles require, we say something on the order of ‘Do it, you know it’s the only right thing, and you are certainly up to the challenge’. Sometimes this minimal exhortative
expression will suffice to tip the scales, but very often much more needs to be said to bring about the desired realization of high-minded aspirations. In such situations the exhortation establishes what Sally Jackson (1992; van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, & Jacobs, 1993) describes as a discursive space within which an exhorter can advance considerations designed to answer her addressee’s reluctance to act as her high-minded commitments require. As an act which opens such a space, exhorting serves first to open this space by securing a sympathetic hearing for what the exhorter has to say and, as we will later observe, it serves to structure that discursive space. The immediate question is: Can what is minimally done from a conceptual point of view to issue an exhortation, suffice pragmatically to secure a sympathetic hearing for what exhorter has to say?

Recall that to produce an exhortation the exhorter must issue a call to principled action. To issue such a call, the exhorter (SE) must at a minimum say that her addressee (AE) is to do x, where x is presented as an act, course of action, policy, etc. required by AE’s paramount obligations and/or aspirations.

On pain of risking criticism for failing to speak truthfully,

Presumably SE believes that AE is to do x and, also, that x is an act, course of action, policy, etc. required by AE’s paramount obligations and/or aspirations.

Presumably SE has made a responsible effort to determine that doing x is required by AE’s paramount obligations and/or aspirations.

Exhortation requires a larger manifest effort to inspire AE to act on his commitment to do x. More specifically, an utterance qualifies as exhortation only if the exhorter speaks with the further manifest intention to draw forth, elicit or arouse an intentional/affective orientation corresponding to her call to action.

On pain of risking criticism for foolish pretension (who does she think she is? God’s anointed),

Presumably SE understands AE’s situation and the constraints which inhibit AE’s full compliance with her high-minded obligations.

Presumably SE has the wherewithal to appropriately inspire compliance with AE’s commitment.

Given these presumptions AE may further assume/presume that the situation to which SE is responding is one in which SE supposes that owing to implicated internal conflicts among AE’s commitments, etc. AE might not rise to the particular challenge posed by AE’s paramount obligations/aspirations and AE may thereupon find SE’s response, i.e., SE’s avowed effort to urge and inspire her, to be a reasonable and appropriate response. AE may then commence to sympathetically listen to SE’s address.

3. Exhorting and discursive space
The performance of various illocutionary acts creates what Sally Jackson has identified as a discursive space within which argumentation can develop (Jackson, 1992; van Eemeren et al., 1993). This possibility is inherent in the nature of this kind of speech act. In the performance of an illocutionary act, a speaker openly undertakes obligations in and in connection with seriously saying and meaning something. Accordingly, the commitments a speaker undertakes in exhorting determine a discursive space in which she can be called upon to defend her exhortation and within which she may find an opportunity to justify her exhortation.

As we prepare to take up our case study of Lincoln’s Cooper Union Address, we should delineate (review) contours of the discursive space generated by exhortation. We have seen that in the exhoser’s call to principled action the exhoser (SE) must at a minimum say that her addressee (AE) is to do x, where x is presented as an act, course of action, policy, etc. required by AE’s paramount obligations and/or aspirations. On pain of criticism for failing to speak truthfully, SE warrants the presumption that SE believes that AE is to do x and, also, that x is an act, course of action, policy, etc. required by AE’s paramount obligations and/or aspirations. Moreover, SE warrants the presumption that SE has made a responsible effort to determine that doing x is required by AE’s paramount obligations and/or aspirations. Accordingly, SE is committed to knowing what, corresponding to her call to action, AE’s paramount obligations/aspirations are. We have seen that exhortation requires a larger manifest effort to inspire AE to act on his obligation, viz., the exhoser speaks with the further manifest intention to draw forth, elicit or arouse an intentional/affective orientation corresponding to her call to action. On pain of criticism for foolish pretension, presumably SE understands AE’s situation and the constraints which inhibit AE’s full compliance with her high-minded obligations. Moreover SE is openly committed to appropriately inspiring compliance on AE’s part. Accordingly, SE is committed not just to knowing what AE’s high-minded obligations/aspirations require, but also to answering AE’s doubts and objections regarding those demands; likewise, SE is committed to answering doubts and objections regarding conflicting doubts and objections arising with respect to AE’s other duties and aspirations. Furthermore, as a practical matter relating to SE’s need to secure a sympathetic hearing, SE needs to discharge these probative commitments in terms which enable AE to identify the sentiment animating SE’s exhortation as a reasonable response to the situation SE apprehends in connection with AE’s conflicting duties, needs, aspirations, etc. We now turn to study how Lincoln negotiated the discursive space in his Cooper Union address.

4. The dynamics of exhorting in Lincoln’s “Cooper Union Address”

Lincoln’s address at Cooper Union, delivered on February 27, 1860 in New York City and subsequently reprinted and circulated as a document related to Lincoln’s campaigns, first, for the Republican Presidential Nomination and, then, for the Presidency, affords a rewarding site for study of the dynamics of argumentation arising from an exhortation. This discourse is historically and artistically significant. It is widely regarded as, in Lincoln’s words, “the speech that made him President,” and is commonly touted as one of Lincoln’s best public discourses (Wilentz, 2009). Our interest, however, focuses on the ways in which the address occupies a discursive space structured by his use of exhortation and derives persuasive force in connection with that speech act.

To be sure, this address is animated by several more or less integrated objectives, but as we will see it is centrally structured by the discursive dynamics of exhorting. By 1860 Lincoln had attained a substantial reputation in Illinois and the West; his Cooper Union Address served
to introduce him to influential East Coast Republicans. It demonstrated his power as a campaign speaker and especially his capacity to deal with the arguments Stephen Douglas, the presumptive Democratic nominee, would mount on behalf of his popular sovereignty program, and it provided Lincoln an opportunity to carry forward the dialogue with Douglas begun in their famous debates and recently renewed by Douglas. Moreover, it enabled Lincoln to unify Republican Party support around his call for an end to the expansion of slavery into the federal territories, and also to demonstrate his capacity to muster such support. The address served these and other significant aims and objectives, but it is, as we will see, centrally organized by the discursive demands of the exhortation Lincoln explicitly articulates in the concluding portion of the address.

Prudently, Lincoln did not open his address with a statement directly exhorting his audience to adhere to any specific course of action. The presumptions generated by such a statement would not have sufficed to warrant a sympathetic hearing on the part of many of his addressees. At the outset of his address Lincoln faced a particularly challenging potential of the risk, which we noted earlier inheres in exhortation, that his addressees would turn a deaf ear to his exhortation. He was largely unknown to his relatively sophisticated audience; consequently he did not bring established moral authority to Cooper Union. On the contrary, his initial ungainly appearance in rumpled, ill-fitting clothes conspired to reinforce the impression that Lincoln was an uncultured western rube (Corry, 2003, pp. 97-99; Holzer, 2004, pp. 108-111). Beyond this Lincoln risked dismissal as a dangerously reckless radical. That identity was assigned to him by Stephen Douglas and had some purchase from Lincoln’s previous claim to the effect that the nation could not exist in perpetuity half slave and half free, a statement which some (mis)construed as an attack on Southern slavery which threatened the continued existence of the Union (Holzer, 2004, p. 117). Anxiety over the alleged radical nature of Lincoln’s opposition to the spread of slavery was heightened by John Brown’s recent raid on Harper’s Ferry and by the Southern contention that “Black Republican” condemnation of slavery aggravated the potential for violence (Corry, 2003, pp. 51-52; Holzer, 2004, pp. 43-45). Moreover, members of his audience had substantial economic ties to Southern slavery and harbored racial aversion to Black people, which ill-disposed them to Lincoln’s program of opposition to the spread of slavery into the territories (Corry, 2003, p. 129; Holzer, 2004, p. 71). Given this skepticism concerning his standing, Lincoln could hardly expect that an opening statement of exhortation would generate the presumption needed to warrant sympathetic hearing for what he had to say.

Rather than initiate his discourse with an exhortative statement, Lincoln adopted a strategy first to establish grounds for the presumptions needed to secure a sympathetic hearing for his concluding explicitly exhortative statement. Accordingly, Lincoln’s speech unfolds in three sections: a case against Stephen Douglas’ position that the founding fathers are on the side of his political party rather than Lincoln’s (Holzer, 2004, pp. 252-267), a direct address to the people of the South (Holzer, 2004, pp. 267-280), and a direct address to Republicans (Holzer, 2004, pp. 280-284). It is not until the third section that Lincoln openly manifests an intention to exhort his addressees. Lincoln begins that section by explicitly exhorting Republicans with a series of statements beginning with “let us”: “Let us Republicans do our part,” “let us do nothing through passion and ill temper,” “let us calmly consider their demands” (Holzer, 2004, p. 280). He closes the section and the speech by exhorting, “Neither let us be slandered from our duty by false accusations against us, nor frightened from it by menaces of destruction to the Government nor of dungeons to ourselves. [Applause.] LET US HAVE FAITH THAT RIGHT MAKES MIGHT, AND IN THAT FAITH, LET US, TO THE END, DARE TO DO OUR DUTY AS WE
UNDERSTAND IT” (Holzer, 2004, p. 284). Within this structure the first two sections serve as precursors which enable Lincoln to lay the grounds for his exhortation, while evoking a sympathetic hearing.

While notice of his address had attracted a large, curious crowd interested in learning something of this emerging politician from the West, initially Lincoln was not warmly received; however, he shortly gained his audience’s close attention. Reports concur that he soon earned a deeply sympathetic hearing. By the time he reached his concluding exhortation, he is said to have held the audience in the palm of his hand. In retrospect, this should come as no surprise. From early on in his career, Lincoln had recognized the importance of cultivating a warm relationship with his addressees and had developed a powerful capacity to do that (Holzer, 2004). It will prove instructive to see how Lincoln exercised that capacity on this occasion. We turn then to his precursory statements.

The first section of Lincoln’s discourse addresses Stephen Douglas’s attempt to appropriate the sanction of the nation’s founders for his doctrine of popular sovereignty. According to Douglas, the founding fathers had reserved to states and by implication to territories the right to determine the status of slavery within their respective domains; accordingly, Douglas held that the federal government had no right to proscribe slavery in any of the nation’s territories, and it would properly be up to the residents to determine whether they applied for statehood as free or slave. Lincoln held the opposite. From Douglas’s introduction of this doctrine in the Compromise of 1854, Lincoln maintained that the founders not only sanctioned federal regulation of the status of slavery in territories, for the most part they opposed the introduction of slavery outside the states where it was already established.

The Cooper Union Address is an extension and conclusion of his “dialogue” with Douglas in terms which were well conceived to facilitate a sympathetic hearing on the part of his audience. At the outset Lincoln succinctly and starkly identifies the situation to which he is responding. He recalls that Douglas had recently renewed defense of his doctrine of popular sovereignty on the supposition, “Our fathers, when they framed the Government under which we live, understood this question just as well, and even better, than we do now” (Holzer, 2004, p. 252). Lincoln accepted this supposition as a mutually agreed upon starting point for his argument with Douglas and explicitly adopted it (and made powerful use of it) as the text for his discourse: it “furnishes a precise and agreed upon starting point for a discussion between Republicans and that wing of the Democracy headed by Senator Douglas” (Holzer, 2004, p. 252). Lincoln then further refined his delineation of situation, identifying the frame of government as the “Constitution of the United States” and the fathers as the thirty-nine who signed the original document. The question referred to in the text Lincoln takes to be: “Does the proper division of local from federal authority, or anything in the Constitution, forbid our Federal Government to control as to slavery in our Federal Territories” (Holzer, 2004, p. 253). Lincoln completes this picture of the situation with an identification of the issue arising between Douglas’ affirmative answer and the Republican denial.

Lincoln explicitly framed the discussion as a lawyerly interrogation of his clash with Douglas’s position. The situation to which he was responding was one initiated by Douglas’s recent renewed defense for his doctrine. Douglas premised that defense on the supposition, “Our fathers, when they framed the Government under which we live, understood this question just as well, and even better, than we do now.” Lincoln accepted this supposition as a mutually agreed upon starting point for his argument with Douglas, and he proceeded to a meticulous examination of the historical record to determine in a carefully documented fashion whether the
authors of the nation’s Constitution (Lincoln’s interpretation of the “founders”) held that the federal government was prohibited from regulating the status of slavery in the territories. We should notice that this framework for Lincoln’s response to Douglas clearly delineates the situation to which he is responding and manifests the sentiment with which he is speaking, i.e., an objective inquiry proceeding in a lawyerly attempt to determine the truth of the matter. The situation and Lincoln’s sentiment are presented in terms which facilitate empathic projection on the part of addressees.

Moreover, Lincoln’s development of this inquiry is well designed to enable him to explicitly manifest the reasonable (the reasoned adequacy) and appropriateness of his response. Lincoln makes relevant norms for the rational adequacy and appropriateness of his argument determinate as he begins the speech. For example, he makes manifest the norm of fairly and appropriately identifying common ground with opponents as he repeats Douglas’ position as quoted in the New York Times and describes the text as “a precise and an agreed starting point for a discussion between Republicans and that wing of the Democracy headed by Senator Douglas” (Holzer, 2004, p. 252). He makes manifest norms of the debate as he defines key terms, states his and Douglas’s positions on the issue, and comments on what he is doing: “This affirmation and denial form an issue; and this issue—this question—is precisely what the text declares our fathers understood ‘better than we’” (Holzer, 2004, p. 253). He makes determinate the norm of gathering and presenting evidence as he concludes the section by stating that if anybody “sincerely believes” that the federal government may not prohibit slavery in federal territories, “he is right to say so, and to enforce his position by all truthful evidence and fair argument which he can. But he has no right to mislead others, who have less access to history, and less leisure to study it, into the false belief,” thereby “substituting falsehood and deception for truthful evidence and fair argument” (Holzer, 2004, p. 266). Given this explicit basis for evaluating the reasonableness of Lincoln’s response to the situation, his audience can readily be drawn into sympathetic consideration of his historical review which concludes that a substantial majority of the original founders saw no constitutional barrier to the national government’s regulation of slavery in the territories. This showing tends to vindicate Lincoln’s position and that of his party as a defense of the founder’s “sacred” position.

As this review of the record regarding the founders’ understanding of the Constitutional authority for federal regulation of slavery in the territory unfolds, Lincoln’s manifest sentiment evolves from a narrowly lawyerly inquiry to a prosecutorial assault on Douglas’s position. Douglas is not mentioned during this development; rather, as he rounds each step in his review of the historical record, showing by mounting numbers ever broader support for his position, Lincoln repeats Douglas’s statement concerning the founders’ superior understanding of the question.

Having developed his vindication of the Republican obligation to oppose the spread of slavery into the territories, Lincoln turns to consideration of whether Southern opposition affords concerns that override his audience’s duty to maintain the founders’ restriction of slavery to areas where it has long been established. He tackles this disturbing line of argument in apostrophic dialogue ostensibly addressed to the people of the South, but fundamentally designed for consideration of his Republican audience. Several potentially overriding considerations were in conflict with resolute opposition to the spread of slavery into the territories. Many Southerners were stridently committed to the expansion of slavery into the territories and deeply offended by Republican condemnations of slavery as morally wrong. A substantial segment favored secession from the Union should Republicans come into a position
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to limit the spread of slavery into the territories. Preservation of the Union was a paramount concern for many citizens, Lincoln included. If his exhortation is to succeed, he must discharge his obligation to afford a satisfactory resolution to this conflict. A second conflict involved economic concerns. New York was economically connected to Southern produce and commerce. Insofar as opposition to the expansion of slavery threatened to disrupt commercial relations with the South, some in Lincoln’s audience would be disinclined to give serious consideration to his exhortation.

Lincoln addressed these conflicts by arguing that Southern fears regarding Republican opposition to the spread of slavery into the territories were fundamentally baseless. Despite their moral abhorrence of slavery, Lincoln and likeminded Republicans had no intention of disturbing the status of slavery in the southern states where it was established on the basis of tradition and constitutionally protected. Lincoln presented this argument by making as if to address the people of the South with answers to the complaints and charges they levelled to “Black Republicans.” Supposing that by this point in the address Lincoln had secured a measure of sympathetic empathy, this tactic should enable Republicans to join in his sense of righteously treating the South and his indignation at the unreasonableness of their baseless complaints and their unwillingness to give fair consideration to Republican reassurances. This vicarious experience stands to enhance and strengthen his empathetic rapport with his addressees and to prepare them to give a strongly sympathetic hearing to the third and concluding portion of his address.

Lincoln shows that he understands the situation and constraints that inhibit Republicans’ full compliance with their duty to restrict slavery to areas where it was already established. He shows the reasonable adequacy and appropriateness of his response to complaints by the South by taking up accusations levelled against Republicans, including charges that they are “Black Republicans,” sectional, revolutionary, make the slavery question prominent, and cause insurrections. He denies or justifies each charge with evidence and reasoning. Apostrophizing displays the South’s rhetorical conduct as a foil to his own and serves as grounds for sharing Lincoln’s sentiment of righteousness and indignation at the South’s willful stubbornness in not giving fair consideration to Republican reassurances to tolerate and protect slavery where it exists. Lincoln begins the section by objecting to the South’s “unconditional condemnation of ‘Black Republicanism,’” remarking that “such condemnation of us seems to be an indispensable prerequisite-license, so to speak—among you to be admitted or permitted to speak at all” (Holzer, 2004, p. 267). Lincoln then makes explicit what ought to be qualifications for a license to speak: “Now, can you, or not, be prevailed upon to pause and to consider whether this is quite just to us, or even to yourselves? Bring forward your charges and specifications, and then be patient long enough to hear us deny or justify” (Holzer, 2004, p. 267).

In what follows Lincoln delineates the situation that warrants indignation at the South’s incendiary conduct and baseless, unreasonable complaints. He asserts that some people of the South “delight to flaunt in our faces the warning against sectional parties given by Washington in his Farewell Address” (Holzer, 2004, p. 268); that they “reject, and scout, and spit upon that old policy” which would ground their claims to conservatism (Holzer, 2004, p. 269); that they “need to be told that persisting in a charge which one does not know to be true, is simply malicious slander” (Holzer, 2004, p. 270); that they “never dealt fairly by us in relation to” Harper’s Ferry (Holzer, 2004, p. 271); that their threat to “break up the Union rather than submit to a denial of your Constitutional rights . . . has a somewhat reckless sound; but it would be palliated, if not fully justified, were we proposing, by the mere force of numbers, to deprive you of some right, plainly written down in the Constitution. But we are proposing no such thing” (Holzer, 2004, pp.
274-75); that “the threat of death to me [by a robber], to extort my money, and the threat of
destruction to the Union, to extort my vote, can scarcely be distinguished in principle” (Holzer,
2004, p. 280).

Lincoln shows further grounds for righteousness as he makes manifest the rational
adequacy of his own conduct and Republican reassurances to tolerate and protect slavery where
it exists by making norms of debate determinate. For example, he says, “You say we are
sectional. We deny it. That makes an issue; and the burden of proof is upon you” (Holzer,
2004, p. 267). He asks the people of the South to meet them “on the question of whether our principle,
put in practice, would wrong your section; and so meet it as if it were possible that something
may be said on our side” (Holzer, 2004, p. 268); and to consider “whether your claim of
conservatism for yourselves, and your charge of destructiveness against us, are based on the most
clear and stable foundations” (Holzer, 2004, p. 269). Given this explicit basis for evaluating the
rational adequacy of Lincoln’s response to the situation, his audience can readily be drawn into
sympathetic consideration of his attempts to reassure the people of the South—and people of his
own party who may be wavering in their duty due to fears of disunion and disruption of
commercial relations—that Republicans would tolerate and protect slavery where it currently
exists, so the South’s opposition to a Republican presidency ought not override Republicans’
duty to maintain the founders’ restriction of slavery to areas where it already existed.

5. Conclusions

In summary, we have argued that the essential structure of exhortation is (1) making statements
openly designed to urge auditors to develop high-minded commitments to matters of right, duty,
and the like; and (2) manifestly speaking with the intention of inspiring a resolve to act on those
commitments. The exhorter speaks with the intention that her addressees’ recognition of (1) and
(2) provides them with reason to grant a sympathetic hearing to what the speaker has to say. In
addition, we have identified the underlying pragmatics that constitute exhortation—how
exhortations are designed to inoculate the exhorter from easy dismissal as an extremist crank.
Exhorting licenses addressees to presume that the exhorter would not risk criticism for failing to
speak truthfully or for foolish pretension unless she had made a responsible effort to determine
that doing x is the addressees’ duty and unless she understood the constraints inhibiting
addressees’ full compliance with their high-minded obligations. She incurs an obligation to
answer doubts and objections regarding the addressees’ conflicting duties. By vividly
manifesting that the sentiments animating the discourse and the speaker’s take on the situation
that prompts those sentiments are reasonable and appropriate, the speaker designs a disagreement
space in which exhorting may secure a sympathetic hearing.

Moreover, we have accounted for the persuasive force of Lincoln’s Cooper Union
Address. In the first section Lincoln vindicates the Republican obligation to oppose the spread of
slavery into territories by delineating the situation and his sentiment: in a lawyerly manner he
proceeds from an objective inquiry into the truth of whether his opponent or Lincoln’s own party
is on the side of the founding fathers to a prosecutorial assault on Douglas’s position. In the
second section Lincoln shows that Southern fears regarding Republicans’ opposition to the
spread of slavery are baseless and, so, are not overriding concerns that could serve as grounds for
not doing their duty to maintain the founders’ restriction of slavery to territories where it
currently existed. These opening sections create the grounds and design the disagreement space
so as to prepare the audience to be receptive to his exhortation in the third section of the speech.
They vividly manifest Lincoln’s sentiments as a reasonable, appropriate response to the situation that prompted them. By making this argument we hope to have contributed to a growing body of scholarship that accounts for the persuasive force of civically significant speech acts. Moreover, by accounting for the persuasive force of Lincoln’s exhortation, our study suggests how ordinary arguers may design a disagreement space (Jackson, 1992) to communicatively create conditions for exhortations to have persuasive force.

References