

Isabela Fairclough and Norman Fairclough, *Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students*. London: Routledge, 2012; x + 266 pp.: ISBN 978-0-415-49923-1, \$ 38.90 (Paperback).

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Received: 15-04-2014 **Accepted:** 02-07-2014

This volume provides a unified approach to the analysis of political discourse by integrating the main insights of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with the analytic tools of argumentation theory. Norman Fairclough has been investigating the intricate relations between language, power and society since 1980s, significantly advancing and consolidating the methods of CDA. Together with Isabela, they have systematically introduced argumentation analysis and evaluation into the theoretical and methodological toolkit of discourse analysis. According to them, such an integration allows for an empirically adequate understanding and theoretically grounded critique of political discourse as inherently argumentative discourse. This book is the fullest elaboration of their position to date.

The volume consists of six chapters, as well as an introduction and conclusion.

The Introduction does what it should: it concisely introduces the problems to be tackled, theoretical starting points, discursive material to be analyzed, and the main findings. Lazy or busy readers will no doubt appreciate that the authors skillfully summarize the main argument of the entire book in but one sentence of the first paragraph: “[...] politics is most fundamentally about making choices about how to act in response to circumstances and goals, it is about choosing *policies*, and such choices and the actions

which follow from them are based upon practical argumentation” (p. 1). This is an important theoretical statement, which is then thoroughly discussed and defended throughout the book. This discussion does not stop at theoretical speculation but rather, characteristically for discourse analysts, develops through detailed studies of actual examples – in this case, big public debates over the global financial crisis which began in 2007, with the special focus on the UK. Already in the introduction the authors sketch two basic explanatory representations of the crisis: it was a systemic failure of neoliberal capitalism or a contingent set of non-systemic malpractices of concrete individuals (greedy bankers, rogue traders, myopic regulators). In Fairclough and Fairclough’s account such representations work as circumstantial premises in practical arguments which provide support for different conclusions: we should radically change the way we govern our society vs. we should punish these few guilty ones, introduce local amendments, and return to business as usual. Everybody who has witnessed public debates during the global crisis will find these analyses adequate and illuminating. These themes are then developed throughout the volume.

Chapter 1: ‘Political discourse analysis and the nature of politics’, sets the theoretical grounds for treating politics as an arena of public action justified and critiqued through practical argumentation and deliberation. Since politics is made under the conditions of urgency, uncertainty, value pluralism, and persistent disagreements, political argumentation belongs to the realm of plausible and ever correctable rather than deductively valid and conclusively resolved. The authors discuss various approaches to politics and political discourse which largely support their view of politics as argumentative activity: from Aristotle to present-day deliberative democrats and radical democrats. Alternative approaches to political discourse analysis – those of Chilton and Wodak & Reisigl – are criticized for lack of coherent framework and focus on representations at the expense of argumentation and action.

Chapter 2: ‘Practical reasoning: A framework for analysis and evaluation’ makes up a central theoretical chapter of the book, in which the authors develop their account of practical argumentation. They do so on the basis of a comprehensive review of the philosophical literature on practical reasoning (from Aristotle to Audi, and from Hume to Searle) and chief insights from dialectical theories of argumentation (van Eemeren et al.,

Walton). Fairclough & Fairclough propose that practical arguments move from the *circumstantial* premise (current context of action, problem to be tackled) to the *goal* premise (imagined future state of affairs) supported by the agent's *values* (private concerns, public commitments), through the *means-goal* premise (action A will presumably take us from circumstances to goals in accordance with our values), to the *conclusion* that action A ought to be taken. On the basis of this structure, practical arguments can be evaluated in a dialectical procedure through critical questions.

In the final theoretical Chapter 3: 'Critical discourse analysis and analysis of argumentation' Fairclough & Fairclough argue for a theoretical continuity between Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) – indeed, critical social science at large – and argumentation theory. According to them, argumentation analysis and evaluation strengthens and systematizes the normative and explanatory critique of discursive domination, manipulation and ideologies. Some crucial concepts of CDA – 'imaginaries', 'political legitimacy' – gain precision when approached from a dialectical perspective on practical argumentation. These points are illustrated via a "reanalysis" of a speech of the former British PM Tony Blair, previously examined in an argumentation-free version of N. Fairclough's CDA.

Chapters 4-6 consist of extended case studies of political discourse in the UK during the financial crisis. Here, the theoretical and methodological apparatus developed in earlier chapters is practically applied and tested. Do public debates indeed revolve around the performance and critique of practical arguments? Following the Faircloughs' coherent analyses, one would have to say yes. This is first made clear in Chapter 4: 'The economic crisis in the UK: Strategies and arguments', where the authors carefully examine the 2008 "Pre-Budget Report" of the (soon to be voted out of power) Labour government and the 2010 "Emergency Budget Report" of the new Coalition Government (Conservatives and Liberal Democrats). In both cases the analytic method is the same: the authors first reconstruct the budget speeches using their framework of practical argumentation, and then evaluate them by asking relevant critical questions (e.g. "Are the goals of action rationally acceptable? What other goals have been considered?"). In evaluation, they skilfully draw on a wider public debate over crisis, including objections from critical commentators (journalists, academics, politicians). The results are unsurprising but far from optimistic. Both governments'

budget policies “have not been found rationally persuasive” for a number of reasons clearly distinguishable in the proposed layout of practical arguments: “other political goals ought to be considered, and have not been; there are reasonable alternatives that should be considered but have not been. There is a strong probability that the strategy will misfire and fail to achieve its stated goals, and will end up sacrificing goals that should not be sacrificed” (and so forth) (pp. 174-175).

In the following chapter, ‘Values as premises in the public debate over bankers’ bonuses’, Fairclough & Fairclough move away from formal deliberations in the British Parliament to the informal political discourse in the online public sphere. They analyze readers’ comments posted in an online edition of *The Guardian* following a statement of a Goldman Sachs vice-chairman in which he argued that “we have to tolerate inequality”. The chairman’s argumentation supporting the ‘trickle-down’ economics is analyzed as a *prudential argument* for inequality which fails badly as a rationalization verging on a blackmail (if you don’t pay us high bonuses, we’ll move our business out of the UK). By contrast, *The Guardian* users build collectively coherent *moral arguments* against inequality based on concrete conceptions of justice-as-desert or justice-as-fairness. Such values constitute external reasons for action, which might be independent from arguers’ desires but are nevertheless reasonably required in public discourse.

In the final Chapter 6: ‘Deliberation as genre in the parliamentary debate on university tuition fees’ the authors return to the British House of Commons in order to provide a procedural account of parliamentary debates in terms of deliberation. Drawing on the pragma-dialectical concept of deliberation as a genre of argumentative activity and on the formal model of deliberation by McBurney, Hitchcock & Parsons, Fairclough & Fairclough analyze various stages of parliamentary deliberation with a special view on the institutional conditions for argumentation. Deliberation, in its core, amounts to an exchange of practical arguments supporting a motion in favor of a particular proposal (“We should raise university tuition fees to a maximum of £9,000”) and critical questions and objections against this proposal. Due to its institutional rules and procedures, parliamentary debate significantly departs from ideal models of argumentation (such as pragma-dialectical critical discussion) but still “delivers an outcome which is procedurally legitimate and can ground political action” (p. 233).

Finally, the book's Conclusion summarizes the main results of the study and theoretical contributions to the main approaches employed throughout the volume: argumentation theory, critical discourse analysis, and political science.

As I hope is clear from this overview, *Political Discourse Analysis* deals with an immense theoretical and empirical material, while consistently focusing on argument as "the main analytical category" (p. 4). For some, this would amount to an unnecessary eclecticism, for others to dangerous 'methodological absolutism' (see below for the special issue of *Political Studies Review*). So is the truth somewhere in the middle?

The undeniable merit of Fairclough and Fairclough's work is smooth application of theoretical concepts tracing the structure of practical reasoning to concrete, pressing and complex societal issues, such as the financial crisis in Europe and elsewhere. As a result, we gain a fairly solid insight into what is fine or, most of the time, what is wrong with public arguments of the parties directly involved in the management of the crisis: bankers, politicians, public intellectuals, etc. We are in a much better position to understand which values drive the bankers' behavior, what goals exactly the government wants to reach by raising tuition fees, and so forth. This marks a significant advantage over philosophical approaches, typically investigating the smallest possible units of practical reasoning, with their intricate, and no doubt philosophically salient, problems (*akrasia*, the structure of internal beliefs-desires-intentions, the logic of reasoning from necessary and sufficient means, etc.). Those who think that studying practical reasoning is always about catching the 2.30 train to London, borrowing money to buy a boat, or flying to Paris to see the Eiffel Tower, will be positively surprised or, who knows, perhaps puzzled here. Philosophers of reasoning, such as John Broome, do admit that we rarely reason following the simplest structures of practical argument they dissect – and arguably for this reason they often pursue their work on serious matters such as climate change in a line of research completely detached from studying practical reasoning. In contrast, Fairclough & Fairclough treat arguers and society in one consistent framework, based on the well-justified assumption that the link between the structures of society and reasoning agents cannot be cut. This link, at least partly, is constituted through practical argumentation.

A related asset of the book, and one particularly relevant to argumenta-

tion scholars, is the authors' clear and convincing application of the tools developed in argumentation theory (argument structures and schemes, critical questions, critical testing) to important cases of political discourse. Argumentation theory – used in synergy with other theories (CDA, theory of deliberative democracy, public policy analysis) – works effectively as a systematic way of understanding the values, goals, courses of action and representations of social reality constituting political discourse.

Reservations that can be raised about the work relate to its somewhat eclectic nature. To be sure, it is intellectually rewarding to see John Searle shaking hands with Karl Marx, and Frans van Eemeren facing Slavoj Žižek in one book – especially when the authors are aptly using the best bits and pieces of given theories to offer a consistent and novel line of analysis. Eventually, however, under relentless critical pressure some fault lines will appear. Can we really conceive of a critical approach to discourse which coherently unifies the Kantian, Marxist and Popperian understanding of critique? Is it possible to reconcile the analytic philosophers' tight grip on basic units of practical reasoning with the grand concepts of continental critical theorists? Or the rational reconstructions of argumentation analysts with CDA's scrutiny of hegemonic uses of language? Or the opportunities for reasoned consensus stressed by (some of the) deliberative democrats with inherent antagonisms of today's societies? It seems that some of these intellectual bridges are too long to cross, at least in one volume.

Luckily, these questions – and many others – are already thoroughly debated among the expert readers of *Political Discourse Analysis* and its authors (see contributions to the symposium on the book published in *Political Studies Review*, 2013, vol. 11, issue 3, pp. 311-344). This in itself is a welcome sign of the academic impact the book is making.

One final remark – through its subtitle (*A Method for Advanced Students*) the volume stresses its hybrid credentials, as partly a monograph, and partly a handbook that can be used in graduate and postgraduate courses. I have had a chance of discussing large parts of the book with students during a master's seminar on *Political Argumentation: Strategies and Critique* (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal). Overall, it was a gratifying experience for the students, although two points require a mention. First, some of the longer analyses (the Budget Reports in Ch. 4) seem rather repetitive and tedious to attention-deprived readers of today. Sec-

ond, the students – although “advanced” is one sense or another – missed some more concrete instructions on how to actually “do” political discourse and argumentation analysis. In this respect, the book requires some methodological backup which can be provided by N. Fairclough’s *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (2003) or any solid introduction into the methods of argumentation analysis and evaluation.