

Rhetoric of Popular Culture

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The Social False Dilemma: Perpetuating Conflicts between Liberals and Conservatives

Fałszywy dylemat społeczny: Utrwalanie konfliktów między liberałami i konserwatystami

Abstract

This essay addresses the establishment of a social false dilemma in the form of the socially-constructed categories of liberals and conservatives. The illogical positioning of only two options for solving a problem reduces an audience's ability for developing creative solutions. The dichotomous nature of this political positioning undercuts critical thought through politicians' usage of entrenched either-or thinking. In turn, the people struggle with a deliberative process that is underscored by an acceptance of a false dilemma. In particular, this essay focuses on an American dichotomous political climate by acknowledging the existence of the dichotomy, the promotion of *Dissoi Logoi* to avoid the false dilemma, and the repercussions of compromised deliberative functions of democracy.

Niniejszy esej dotyczy umacniania się fałszywego dylematu (błędu fałszywej alternatywy) w konstrukcji społecznych kategorii liberałów i konserwatystów. Błąd logiczny fałszywej alternatywy polega na wprowadzaniu tylko dwóch opcji rozwiązania problemu, czym zaburza zdolność odbiorców do generowania kreatywnych rozwiązań. Dychotomiczność politycznych pozycji utrudnia także myślenie krytyczne poprzez wprowadzanie argumentacji typu albo-albo. W przypadkach, kiedy w sferze publicznej zakłada się dychotomię w ramach fałszywego dylematu, deliberacja na temat polityczny jest praktycznie uniemożliwiona. Niniejszy esej skupia się na sytuacji podziałów w polityce amerykańskiej, zwraca uwagę na przykłady dychotomii, promuje *Dissoi Logoi* jako sposób ominięcia błędu fałszywej alternatywy oraz omawia konsekwencje dychotomiczności dla deliberacji w systemie demokratycznym.

Key words

false dilemma, *Dissoi Logoi*, liberals, conservatives, critical thinking
fałszywy dylemat, *Dissoi Logoi*, liberałowie, konserwatyści, krytyczne myślenie

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The Social False Dilemma: Perpetuating Conflicts between Liberals and Conservatives

1. Introduction

The permeation of dichotomous identities into popular culture begs us to consider the appropriateness of such identities. Americans find themselves in a two-party political system that promotes the social contention of liberals versus conservatives. Although the parties have changed since the formation of the country, a consistent dichotomy between two major political viewpoints has dominated the country's political scene. Naturally, such a dichotomy encourages either-or thinking with the expectation that politicians choose a side. In turn, citizens may mirror the projection of the two political sides in their own individual viewpoints. Hence, as rhetorical critics, we must ask to what degree citizens construct their personal viewpoints according to the categories rhetorically presented by politicians engaging in the two-party system. The nature of American partisan politics begets a dichotomous fantasy, and the constant reinforcement of that fantasy through current media availability challenges a rational public.

All too common we hear the false dilemma of political points of view used by various people to frame the social establishment. Speakers of political rhetoric may assume that dilemmas can be solved by a liberal or a conservative point of view. In such a rhetorical positioning, most speakers allocate their point of view as ideal, thus advocating for the stance on grounds of superiority. This superiority links itself with righteous imagery and sometimes morphs into a rhetoric of good versus evil, in tune with American rhetorical tradition. The assumption by a political speaker that little evidence is needed to justify the establishment of such a dichotomy results from the culture's socialization of right versus wrong patterns of speech. We must avoid Habermas's (2006, 417) cynicism that "[votes] are shaped by the confused din of voices rising from both everyday talk and mediated communication" (417).

The rise of social media has resulted in a recruitment of all citizens with internet access as both audiences and public media producers. The press maintains an integral position as the fourth estate in American society to report to the people regarding any governmental abuses of power. Now this important responsibility of the press spread to all citizens with internet access. Citizens unknowingly may take up this mantle when remediating information via social media. Some politicians may succeed in having citizens spread messages without challenging the validity of these messages. The increase in social media users increases the odds that some users will not challenge politicians' messages. In turn, social media presents politicians with an opportunity to spread unfiltered messaging. Although political binaries have existed for some time, the integration of the people into public media producers alongside the rise of social media raises concern regarding the functioning of the public sphere. In addition, American governmental conclusions of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election raises additional concerns regarding any compromised decision-making of the citizenry.

In this essay, I seek to highlight the fabricated nature of the social dilemma of liberals versus conservatives. First, I advocate for the use of *Dissoi Logoi* to promote the valued acceptance of multiple viewpoints. Second, I elaborate on the false dilemma involving these two labels and the connection to identity construction. Third, I illustrate the ensuing rhetorical attack tactics employed alongside the labels. Fourth, I explain how this social false dilemma compromises the deliberative functions of democracy. In turn, I hope to secure the message of *Dissoi Logoi* as a means to avoid identity construction surrounding the social false dilemma and its negative impact on society's critical thinking.

Dissoi Logoi

Political landscapes in some countries settle into binary opposites. For instance, politicians and pundits may use phrases such as *right-wing*, or *left-wing* and liberal and conservative. These phrases follow social acceptance of a political spectrum that allows for these polar opposites. The continued promotion of these labels ensures the labels' perpetuation. When a rhetor forms a dichotomy by positioning two items opposite of each other, the rhetor may rely on persuasion instead of logic to promote one viewpoint over another (Sanborn 1955, 177). In this case, a rhetor satisfies audience motives to sway it to one side (Sanborn 1955, 177).

The classical Greek Sophists promoted relativism in order to consider alternative points of view, thereby accepting social contradictions as subjective disagreements. According to the Sophists, many viewpoints had merit. Unlike Plato, who advocated for a dialectic approach to reach a truthful understanding regarding

a matter with differing viewpoints, the Sophists accepted differing viewpoints as both correct and incorrect. An anonymous Sophist author wrote *Dissoi Logoi* between 403-395 BCE to show the simultaneous existence of contradictory viewpoints, and to establish an understanding that advocates of both viewpoints can promote their viewpoint as correct, thereby refuting the differing viewpoint as incorrect. However, the anonymous author points out that this perspective occurs simultaneously, both sides consider their viewpoints as correct and the opposition's as incorrect. For example, the anonymous author offers examples such as, "death is bad for those who die, but good for the undertakers and the grave-diggers" and "the Spartan victory over the Athenians and their allies was good for the Spartans, but bad for the Athenians and their allies" (*Dissoi Logoi*, Ch. 1). The anonymous author illustrates contradictions such as these in sections addressing good and bad, seemly and shameful, just and unjust, and truth and falsehood (*Dissoi Logoi*, Ch. 1-4). Such simultaneous viewpoints place two competing rhetors as both being right and neither being right. In turn, rhetoricians would do well to consider the viewpoints of others as a means to realize that social and political issues should not be one-sided because that causes a stalemate with no resolution on the social or political issues. For instance, Olbrys encourages *Dissoi Logoi* as a pedagogical tool in university classrooms to encourage students to consider differing points of view (Olbrys 2006, 361). The citizenry would do well to take the stance of *Dissoi Logoi* as a means of appreciating alternative arguments, thereby relieving entrenched viewpoints that prevent progression.

While the anonymous author of *Dissoi Logoi* promotes the appreciation of multiple viewpoints, the opposite seems to happen when politicians reinforce entrenched identities. Connolly states, "politics pervades the relation of identity to difference and that affirmation of the relational and constructed character of identity can nevertheless make a difference to ethical quality of political life" (ix). A political false dilemma between labels of liberals and conservatives supports one viewpoint as correct, thereby acknowledging the alternative viewpoint as incorrect. Such a stance does not allow resolutions to advance. Instead, some may perceive compromise as caving in to the demands of the opposition. Promotion of entrenched identities over the rational discussion of pros and cons concerning various political issues drives individuals away from an empowered citizenry that participates in the public sphere.

2. The Liberal/Conservative False Dilemma

A speaker engaging in a fallacy known as a false dilemma positions only two possible options for solving a problem. To the speaker's advantage, the speaker

paints his or her viewpoint in very positive terms while providing a very negative alternative. With such a positive option opposite such a negative option, the speaker urges an audience to rationally decide to pick the speaker's side. False dilemmas can be very persuasive as speakers typically create caricatures or straw persons of oppositional points of view in order to influence their audience. The important component of a false dilemma is the reduction of options: speakers provide only two options, hoping that audiences will select in the speaker's favor. That is why Tomic stresses the ability to sift through a false dilemma as integral to critical thinking (Tomic 2013, 367).

An established false dilemma in American politics is the identifying choice between conservatives and liberals. This dilemma is so grand in scale that it takes on social repercussions. People constantly see the reinforcement of a rhetorical divide between these options branching out from politics into popular culture. The constant reinforcement of these liberal or conservative labels presents a problem that promotes identity over deliberative action. Tomic argues that our abilities to recognize false dilemmas may "liberate us from accepting the consequences that necessarily follow from prearranged alternatives" (Tomic 2013, 367). So, we must accept that the dichotomous positioning of liberals against conservatives is a rhetorical construction strongly perpetuated by some political actors. For instance, some members of the American Republican party may identify as conservatives while some members of the American Democratic party may identify as liberals. In an ideal world, citizens evaluate the merits of individual legislative arguments. However, numerous issues that arise in social debate leave many citizens to consider attitudes rather than arguments on matters they may not realize affect them. Adherence to a political party or social identity can help individuals navigate attitudes on these matters.

Politicians from both major U.S. political parties, Democrats and Republicans, reinforce a dichotomous nature in the political realm. Former U.S. Secretary of State and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton said in an October 9, 2018 interview in response to a contentious selection of Brett Kavanaugh to the U.S. Supreme Court, "So I don't know how people are going to react to it. I think, given our divides, it will pretty much fall predictably between those who are for and those who are against" (as cited in Krever 2018, par. 3). Clinton's matter-of-fact mention of "our divides" reinforces such a division. While massive disagreement exists that naturally pushes individuals into a deliberative attitude of yes or no on that particular political topic, we must not miss the point that this politician's rhetoric relies on the establishment of a divisive dichotomy. This is of note due to the gathering of people not by commonalities but by divisions from others. Likewise, in October 2018, U.S. Senators Mitch McConnell and Susan Collins referenced "both sides of the aisle" regarding implied blame for political rhetoric's connection

to violence from racist mass shootings at a grocery store and synagogue and the targeting of political enemies with pipe bombs (as cited in Barrett 2018, pars. 7, 9). The physical illustration of members of the U.S. Congress sitting on opposite sides of a room strengthens the construction of this either-or thinking. While oppositional political parties necessarily exist to ensure competing ideas for a healthy democracy, a social problem arises when politicians stress the importance of identities over the outcome of deliberative action. In this instance a politician may view the maintenance of a political identity as the desired outcome, as opposed to achieving a specific deliberative action to resolve a specified problem. This may highlight politicians' entrenchments of their beliefs, prioritizing the projections of those beliefs over deliberative resolutions. A politician may recruit identity alliances over the specifics of solving a problem.

Definitions of conservatives or liberals may appear apparent to some, but these definitions surely are subjective. A Democratic or Republican stance on a particular issue is a valid guiding force for deliberative action. Differences between political parties are necessary to ensure creative points of view. But as we witness Democratic and Republican parties become synonymous with liberals and conservatives, respectively, we also must recognize a lean away from topic-based political perspectives to subjective labels of identity. The subjectivity begets the social false dilemma. For instance, political speech spreads to media outlets as secondary sources perpetuating the false dilemma. For example, a February 27, 2019 opinion essay by Sean Hannity on foxnews.com reinforces a negative projection of a liberal identity with its title, "The left is rooting for Trump to fail with North Korea. Their hatred of the president is psychotic." The title of *The New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof's October 20, 2018 opinion essay reads, "Desperately Seeking Principled Republicans: The party has lost its way, and it's time to start over." While these are only two examples from *the right* and *the left*, opinion pieces such as these reveal the trickle-down effect of negatively portraying the opposition by politicians. Subjective application of identifying traits to all topics in general establishes a climate to promote a social false dilemma.

False dilemma takes hold during the dialogic deliberation stage identified by Kim and Kim (2008). Kim and Kim view deliberative democracy as being comprised of two types of deliberation: instrumental deliberation and dialogic deliberation (Kim, Kim 2008, 53). Instrumental deliberation takes place in formal settings when people present arguments to address a specific situation whereas dialogic deliberation develops within informal conversations as people adapt values and identities with no regard for specific dilemmas (Kim, Kim 2008, 53). When referencing informal dialogic deliberation, Kim and Kim (2008) state: "Everyday political talk practically as well as logically precedes formal and instrumental

deliberation” (Kim, Kim 2008, 53). However, this is not the case when politicians present illogical arguments promoting a social false dilemma. While people surely can progress toward instrumental deliberation to solve specific problems, too much of their identities may have been established already according to this false construction. If people engage in dialogic deliberation through informal discussions about political issues, politicians have already framed those issues. Dialogic deliberation enhances an identity within individuals.

The establishment of a political dichotomy based on identity leads to foundations of right and wrong, which further fuels arguments of correct versus incorrect attached to feelings of right and wrong. These feelings gradually evolve into notions of good versus evil. Hence, a false dilemma pits an opposition as an enemy not of a particular argument or topic, but an enemy of an identity: people may view the enemy as evil, and themselves as good. This moral attachment to what should be logical arguments regarding numerous topics reduces all arguments to one identity versus another identity. Such viewpoints lack attempts at resolution. Rather, the goal is to defeat the opposing identity. As the anonymous author of the classical *Dissoi Logoi* text suggests, existences of good and bad, or truth and falsehood, are simultaneously both, based on the differing viewpoints of others. Arguments promoting items as such are frivolous; however, they may succeed in the further entrenchment of binary identities. Whereas a dichotomy between a liberal or conservative perspective is appropriate when gauging individuals’ stances on various social issues, a problem arises when this dichotomy does not pertain to an issue in question, instead, the dichotomy pertains to a generalization of a liberal or conservative identity.

3. Attacking the Opposition

Partakers of either of these identities may promote their viewpoints as the true American identity representative of the people while individuals subjecting themselves only to one viewpoint may believe this due to the dichotomy’s positioning of the oppositional viewpoint as evil. Regarding Kim and Kim’s (2008) appreciation of the contribution that dialogic deliberation makes to democracy due to individuals positioning their personal identities, this deliberation contributes to the social false dilemma if these same people fail to apply their identities towards negotiated outcomes. Whereas dialogic deliberation is a necessary step toward individuals understanding their own viewpoints for the purposes of engaging in reasoned debate, a lack of adaptation toward objective issues reduces the necessity for negotiated dialogue that leads to instrumental deliberation on solving pressing issues. The tangential step between dialogic deliberation and instrumental deliberation leads to the social caricature of oppositional views. For example, U.S.

President Donald Trump said, “Democrats are the problem. They don’t care about crime and want illegal immigrants, no matter how bad they may be, to pour into and infest our Country, like [the gang] MS-13” (as cited in Jackson 2018, par. 2). These caricatures set the stage for people to view an oppositional identity as an enemy.

With an established enemy in place, blaming ensues. Politicians direct this blame to policies enacted by the opposition, as well as the beliefs of the opposition. Illustrating a negative projection of the speaker’s environment followed by association with the opposition may fall close to the hearts of listeners. Speakers utilize tactics of division simultaneously to seek identification with the speaker’s cause. For instance, Clinton said “You cannot be civil with a political party that wants to destroy what you stand for, what you care about” (as cited in Krever 2018, par. 12). Establishing a unifying form of identification means speakers most likely will tackle “implications of division” (Burke 1969b, 20-21). Goehring and Dionisopoulos (2013) support Burke in this identification by antithesis that highlights communal identity surrounding a common enemy. Politicians establish identification through division by implying devil terms for the oppositional identity (Weaver 1953, 212). For example, *liberal* becomes a devil term for conservatives and *conservative* becomes a devil term for liberals. These devil terms for the respective social identities brew disdain for oppositional viewpoints. Connolly (1991) states, “doubts about self-identity are posed and resolved by the constitution of an other against which that identity may define itself” (Connolly 1991, ix-x). People then may focus this disdain toward oppositional people and assign blame. In turn, politicians may scapegoat an oppositional identity using a disdainful devil term in an epideictic attempt to heal their communities. Political speakers rhetorically mold their opposition into scapegoats, physical embodiments of all that is wrong in society. Burke highlights the use of scapegoats as rhetorical devices in the cycle of social redemption that stems from social guilt requiring social purification (Burke 1984, 166-175). To this end, conservatives may scapegoat liberals for social problems as a means to expunge liberals in order to establish a clean social slate, and vice versa.

At issue with scapegoating in this manner is the dichotomous existence of scapegoats on both sides. According to Burke, projecting the ills of a society onto a scapegoat allows that society to purify or heal (Burke 1969a, 406). But in the case of a social false dilemma, the makeup of society is divided. Anonymous states in *Dissoi Logoi*, “what is good is one thing and what is bad is another thing; as the name differs, so likewise does the reality” (Ch. 1). If two halves of a population view two competing scapegoats, then social healing will never take place. Conservatives scapegoating liberals to absolve conservatives of their social ills

will result, at its maximum, in only half of the population's "healing," likewise for liberals. Without majority support for a rhetorical projection of this nature, society will always be in a state of contention. A social false dilemma produces a stalemate. Minor issues are won or lost depending on which political party finds itself having more political power at the moment. This social model is counter-productive and not sustainable. More importantly, the model is based on an illogical fantasy. A false dilemma produces no satisfactory solution for the whole of society. Yet, politicians promoting the false dilemma succeed in solidifying competing identities, thus, perpetuating a contentious cycle. In turn, the cycle fuels entrenched identities further.

While focusing on an enemy of ideological difference, politicians distract the American people from problems arising from a lack of positive legislative improvement. Politicians advocating the false dilemma may make metaphorical threats against their adversaries. When referencing Republicans, former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder said, "When they go low, we kick 'em. That's what this new Democratic party is about" (as cited in Blake 2018, par. 3). Once this happens, detractors will cry foul to the promotion of violence while supporters may roll their eyes over the misrepresentation of metaphors. Ivie and Giner (2007) point out President George W. Bush's rhetoric in the aftermath of 9/11 as reflective of America's reliance on a devilish enemy to ensure the continuance of its democracy. While the pitting of conservatives and liberals against each other is in no way comparable to the violence of Osama bin Laden, we nonetheless see the underpinnings of Americans' rhetoric of fighting good against evil. Liberals and conservatives may attempt to unite Americans under the auspices of their communal righteousness against the enemy of the adversarial ideology. Politicians focusing their rhetoric on an enemy align their speeches to both epideictic and deliberative rhetoric due to the communal, identifying nature of the rhetoric regarding issues often requiring action (Fowler 2018, 140). Ironically, the political strain from which politicians attempt to distract the audience regarding the legislative inaction between conservatives and liberals is itself a fantasy. Some politicians may attempt to distract the public from a fantasy the politicians rhetorically perpetuate. A representative of a social identity only solidifies that social identity's position and fails to unite the people under both identities together under a commonality. However, Hope (2018) found that instrumental deliberation demonstrates a commonality among constituents, represented by their lack of blaming members of oppositional viewpoints, instead focusing any disdain on political leaders who tend to foster dichotomous negativity.

As mentioned earlier in this essay, the rise of social media allows for an increase in interaction between politicians and citizens. Social media is an additional

outlet for direct contact between politicians and their constituents. While an increase in communication can be positive, it also raises the chances for the spread of the false dilemma of liberals versus conservatives. Along with direct contact with politicians, the people also have the opportunity for increased contact with each other. Social media is a mechanism for spreading information, and fallacious and misinformation is bound to spread between users. Also, the medium allows for different degrees of participation, and different platforms impact how people portray themselves online. Hope identifies a stark difference in user contributions to political debates taking place on social media platforms. For instance, Facebook appears to perpetuate the dichotomy of political identities due to its online user dialogues having no clear direction whereas Countable creates structured online deliberations with specific goals in mind for each forum (Hope 2018, 33-34). Clarity in objective outcomes for a debate allows for logical arguments and deliberation to prevail. On the other hand, the emergence of organic online arguments that spread through networked connections lacks goals and tends to divert to general arguments of identity.

4. Compromised Deliberation

Asen calls for increased participation in citizenship by concerning “how citizenship proceeds” (Asen 2004, 194). The author argues for the prominence of the mode in which citizenship occurs as a means to promote agency among citizens. This agency to encourage citizenship adheres to *Dissoi Logoi* due to its focus on discourse between individuals with differing viewpoints. The mode, or process, that citizens use to interact takes precedence over any finite resolution. For instance, the anonymous author of *Dissoi Logoi* suggests that viewpoints are simultaneously correct and incorrect, the process of considering a neighbor’s viewpoint that disagrees with one’s own allows for a better appreciation of one’s neighbor. In turn, such appreciation promotes the critical thinking of alternative viewpoints, thus, strengthening the free-thinking citizenry and ensuring a robust public sphere. Asen states, “Discourse practices present potentially accessible and powerful everyday enactments of citizenship” (Asen 2004, 207).

When referencing the public sphere, Habermas (1989) pleads for the need of a critical, free-thinking public, viewing the degradation of a free-thinking public as the possible downfall of the public sphere. This illustrates the issue with deliberative democracy. Access to so many people allows politicians to disturb the identity-negotiation process by rhetorical means. During a variety of public events, such as press conferences or interviews, that do not pertain to particular instrumental actions politicians frame public situations from political standpoints.

Naturally, this is part of politics. But politicians' increase in access to people via 24/7 journalism and social media raises the exposure of their framed political messages. Habermas states, "the dynamics of mass communication are driven by the power of the media to select, and shape the presentation of, messages and by the strategic use of political and social power to influence the agendas as well as the triggering and framing of public issues" (Habermas 2006, 415). In turn, the presupposition of a free-thinking public identified by Habermas for an effective public sphere may struggle to come into fruition.

The people may see instrumental deliberation impacted by the social false dilemma in American legislative actions where lawmakers vote strictly along party lines. For instance, the recent 2018 U.S. Senate confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh illustrated a trend in recent decades that has shown senators moving away from an approval of a U.S. Supreme Court nominee where a majority of senators, regardless of party, would vote to approve the nominee toward a process where votes represent a contentious vote along party lines. The more this dichotomous narrative plays out among politicians, the more the people may accept the narrative as apparent in their lives. But politicians perpetuating the social false dilemma insert resistance to others within people's minds. Rather than use informal dialogue as a means to negotiate their own identities and understand the identities of others, either-or thinking may disrupt people from considering the viewpoint of another person. Instead, an individual may place other people into one side of the dichotomy. For instance, in 2018 the Pew Research Center found that the majority of Americans rate themselves in the middle of a political spectrum with Democrats on one end and Republicans on the other. In addition, survey respondents identifying themselves as Democrat or Republican view their own parties as moderately off center, yet view the opposing party as extremely to one end of the spectrum (Pew Research Center).

Politicians' access to the media affords them a unique foothold for message delivery (Habermas 2006, 419). Journalists likely report on various messages of politicians due to the nature of the free press holding the state accountable. Politicians surely are aware of this, so they likely use their positions to their advantages. Every opportunity for a politician to speak to a journalist is an opportunity to frame a situation for the public. So, consistent perpetuation of the liberal versus conservative dichotomy by politicians gets funneled through the press and into the minds of the public. Although a role of the press is to report on the accountability of the state, a press agency attaches its ethos to its reporting, conveying a high degree of trust to the public. In turn, individuals receive the critically-evaluated, trusted report from the press and perform their own critical evaluations. Habermas states, "Media professionals produce an elite discourse, fed by actors who struggle

for access to and influence on the media” (Habermas 2006, 417). This elite discourse both filters and repeats the messages of various political actors.

Constant perpetuation of the false dilemma infiltrates the process of criticism due to its possible acceptance by various constituents as matter-of-fact. Habermas points out that a society’s citizens must participate in “a public discourse that [does] not degenerate into a colonizing mode of communication” (Habermas 2006, 420). Political actors infiltrating the foundation of critical thought with a social false dilemma allow such colonies to develop. Critical thinking is an inoculation against illogical messaging, but a foundational acceptance of an illogical message spoils subsequent thinking. The rise of social media allows for direct access between politicians and individuals; journalists no longer serve as gatekeepers of information. When a politician tweets a message, the message goes straight to the people, and social media allow for 24/7 access to people. Along with this constant access there is a loss of a credible information evaluator in the form of journalists. Such unfiltered access is another means for various actors to secure a foothold for the social false dilemma. “Candidate images” within media promote relatable traits between candidates and people (Habermas 2006, 422-23), thus establishing a heightened ethos in the eyes of constituents. But the established ethos of politicians may not reflect reality, rather, it is the constructed image of the politician for marketing purposes. However, the success of such marketing contributes to further message acceptance by various members of the public. In turn, individuals may be connecting to a constructed image of a politician, more evidence of a possible erosion of critical thought. Tomic suggests “a well-developed ability to understand the tricky argumentative moves of false dilemma may be a good step towards initiating some features of critical thinking” (Tomic 2013, 368). The definitions of conservative and liberal are open to interpretation. But the interpretations of these words allows for an even greater false dilemma since the distinction is in the eye of the beholder. The open-ended understandings of the two terms let people see the terms in their own eyes, thus, they may formulate the fantasies of the terms in their own images. Such vague understandings of terms is a benefit to arguments of identification. Lacking objective checklists, people can identify in any way they deem necessary.

Calls of biased reporting have shifted over the years from liberal-oriented calls of conservative bias represented by media owners and advertisers to conservative-oriented calls of liberal bias represented by journalists portrayed as elites (Cimaglio 2016, 10). Both sides of the social false dilemma have cried foul over media bias, which allows for people to call the credibility of news sources into question. For instance, accusations of *fake news* or *biased news* conveniently act as refutations without evidence. This acts as a secondary means of instilling the political dichotomy into the minds of people. A person can hear agreeable viewpoints

that confirm the person's ideological identity while casting off any sources that challenge that ideological identity on the grounds that the source is not credible. Such resistance to open minds reinforces adversarial viewpoints that solidify the social false dilemma. Conservative and liberal media critics tend to rely on very similar rhetorical arguments to highlight perceived media bias by their opposing sides (Cimaglio 2016, 13). For instance, conservative media-critics of the 1960s and 1970s mirrored liberal media-critics from the first half of the 20th century by claiming to represent the majority of Americans against a media elite, who were the media owners or advertisers from the liberal-critic's perspective or the journalists from the conservative-critic's perspective (Cimaglio 2016, 13).

5. Conclusion

A social false dilemma takes shape within a society where politicians promote either-or thinking between two political stances. Politicians advocating for the false dilemma may cast aside appeals to issue resolution in favor of stoking identities that solidify around division from the opposition. These distinctions between dialogic deliberation and instrumental deliberation demarcate the broader positioning of the false dilemma. Dialogic deliberation allows for politicians to encourage the rhetorical fantasy of the social dichotomy to take shape. Rather than accept the false alternative, a free-thinking citizenry should adhere to *Dissoi Logoi* to accept multiple viewpoints and allow substantial debate regarding important political issues to unfold.

A political "battle" between liberals and conservatives is a social false dilemma perpetuated by politicians to convince constituents to their political viewpoints via identification. Politicians use the convenience of media to instill this false dilemma as a norm due to individuals' constant exposure to the political messaging. Cimaglio argues, "The critics (and critiques) who have the most success are often the ones given the biggest platform by the media" (Cimaglio 2016, 13). In turn, this infiltration may corrupt the basis for critical thought despite the false dilemma being a social fantasy. Additionally, the use of scapegoating tactics to portray an oppositional viewpoint reinforces the success of political identification via division. The permeation of this dichotomy from the political realm waged by politicians to the combined public and private realms of citizens due to the unfettered 24/7 media access of the dichotomous messaging alters this false dilemma from one highlighting *politics as usual* to a realization that the dilemma's normalized infiltration compromises the critical thinking of a free people.

Kim and Kim explain the beliefs of political researchers as thinking that "people do not have pre-formed opinions" (Kim, Kim 2008, 61). If so, the worst-case

scenario of the social false dilemma is that people accept a partisan dichotomy with no alternatives and, in turn, feel beholden to form identities within the bounds of the preexisting dichotomy. This essay adds to the research of Kim and Kim (2008) by recognizing dialogic deliberation as the entry point of identity construction. Additionally, this same point is where individuals must follow *Dissoi Logoi* as a means to resist the illogical construction of a false dilemma in the political realm that seeps into the identity construction of citizens' everyday lives.

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