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Religion, Science, and Reasonable Doubts.
Persuading into (Un)faith

Abstract: Based on an argumentative and stylistic methodological framework, this article aims to analyse the persuasive strategies employed in religious discourse, especially in new media. On the one hand, it concentrates on the opposing strategies of counter-discourses – such as science – and on the other, it aims to prove how even non-demonstrative, controversial topics can be moulded into believable presentations through the argumentative structures of persuasive public speech. As an example, *TED* (Technology, Entertainment, Design) is a corporation spreading ideas through 'Talks' held by experts in many fields of knowledge. Three samples from *TED Talks* are thus analysed: *On technology and faith*, held by an evangelical preacher; *Militant atheism*, run by an evolutionary scientist; and *The doubt essential to faith*, given by a journalist. The selected speeches are analysed according to the principles of stylistics (Simpson 1993, 2004) and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's model for understanding rhetoric (1973), focusing on three particular linguistic features: premises, audience, and figures of speech. Such reiterated patterns emphasise the style and strategies used by speakers who – conforming to precise pragmatic purposes – are able to prompt the audience's emotions and solicit a performative effect.

Keywords: *TED Talks*, *persuasion*, *stylistics*, *argumentation*, *religious discourse*

> The last proceeding of reason is to recognise that there is an infinity of things which are beyond it.
> It is but feeble if it does not see so far as to know this.
> Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts*[2]

1. Introduction

Talking about faith today conveys the impression of trying to climb a wall or indulging in scratching an old wound. That wall represents human scepticism, corroborated by increasing distrust towards every obscure controversy and by brand-new technological discoveries; while the scratched wound is the one of present-day believers, weighed down by a widespread secular disbelief. It is not an easy task to find a common dialogue between devotees and atheists, since confronting unshared ideas in a professional and respectful way requires specific knowledge, rhetorical power, and a hint of recommended empathy.

Sensitive topics such as politics and religion are usually hard to place outside of specific cultural circles or official debates since such matters often clash with people's sense of discretion, and their rooted convictions. Therefore, an optimal discourse about thorny topics should create an earnest connection with the audience, to win them over despite their reluctance, because – as TED's president Chris Anderson maintains: "some views are held so deeply that if a speaker seems to be threatening them, people go into a different mode. Instead of listening, they shut down and smolder".[3]

Persuasive discourse – being argumentative in its nature – is the most suitable method to spread an idea and make it alluring to reasonable people. Persuasive strategies in language encourage a change of mind following new assumptions on a certain topic. A speech is considered persuasive when its main aim is to solicit adherence and action, dispelling misgivings and passiveness, and orienting people's interpretation and spirit towards an explanation which is not universally logical, but highly conceivable.[4]

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca maintain that religion is part of those universal values that thrive when relayed through persuasive discourse, since they are among the most unclear notions of our mind which are subject to change with constant rephrasing and additions.

In this paper, religious discourse is interpreted not so much as the language usually extrapolated from sacred texts and catechisms, but as an ordered system of relatively shared beliefs transmitted through the means of rhetoric and embedded in the context of modern technology, thus being far from constituting a logical-demonstrative structure depending on dogmatic theories and established doctrines. Religious discourse is considered in its argumentative possibilities as an unceasing matter of debate, rendering religion a topic of discussion spread with the purpose of convincing someone of its validity or enlightening them about its absurdity[5].

Even though our recent past shows religion as less pliable and more rigorous, modern debates are centred upon the performative power of words, establishing new perspectives towards fundamental human topics, according to the context in which they are uttered. Words are not received passively, since they activate individual reason and ability of interpretation, changing reality through an almost tangible act of speech.[6] A persuasive discourse – being deeply ingrained in the grounding, alluring power of wisely chosen words – depends on the receptive ability of a predisposed audience, who is prone to believe or willing to counteract, either about religion or science.

This paper aims to demonstrate how two opposing discourses about religion may be equally convincing, using the same – sometimes overlapping – persuasive strategies, sharing the same means of communication and equitably prospering in spite of the fluctuating points of view of the contemporary era. The study also seeks to present a compendium of the stylistic and argumentative leitmotivs characterising these discourses.

Although talking about non-demonstrative beliefs and logical linguistic patterns at the same time may seem a contradiction in terms, argumentation is more focused on ethical values than on validating evidence. Hence, a public speech about religion and one about science can share the same amount of persuasive power: they do not address people's true presumptions but their shared cultural values and convictions.

2. Online Discourse and TED Talks

Nowadays, with respect to spreading news and ideas, the Internet is more immediate, immensely faster and more striking than any other qualified medium of transmission. Although online news is more vulnerable to falsification, there are also many digital companies investing in the online industry that try to make a selection among all the available materials to provide multi-perspective knowledge in a modern and engaging way. For instance, TED Talks[7] is a branch of one of the most famous and appreciated corporations spreading information online, one of the first examples of a successful

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[4] See also Manfred Kienpointner, "The Pragmatics of Argumentation", in Marcella Bertuccelli Papi and Jef Verschueren, eds., *The Pragmatic Perspective* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1987), 277-289 and Manfred Kienpointner, "Rhetoric and Argumentation: Relativism and Beyond", *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 24.1 (1991), 43-53.

[5] See also Stephen Pihlaja, ed., *Analysing Religious Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2021).

[6] See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1962) and John Searle, "A Classification of Illocutionary Acts", *Language in Society*, 5 (April 1976), 1-23.

[7] For further information about TED Conferences, LLC see *www.ted.com*.

combination between entertainment and learning. TED conferences aim at connecting people with different ideas and backgrounds, sharing with them concepts relating to culture, science, technology, physics, anthropology, religion, and many other disciplines in a clear, inspiring, and captivating way for a miscellaneous audience with little or no professional training.

> TED began as an annual conference, bringing together the fields of technology, entertainment, and design (hence the name). But in recent years it has expanded to cover any topic of public interest. TED speakers seek to make their ideas accessible to those outside their field by delivering short, carefully prepared talks.[8]

TED Talks include videos of twenty minutes or less distributed online for free on the TED official website as well as on YouTube; they accrue thousands of views and impressions, fuelling discussions and comments. Video conferences are public, accessible to a great number of heterogeneous users, whether in-person attendees or online viewers. Speakers are charismatic personalities with multifaceted backgrounds: they include professors, actors, comedians, journalists, scientists, preachers, and so on. A TED public speech is held on stage by professionals arguing about new discoveries, funny facts, amazing secrets, personal experiences. Their main purpose is to spark interest and inspiration, to make people laugh, elaborate, and think about their lives, discovering something new – or even old, but never focused upon – about the surrounding world.

It could be argued that entertainment and conciseness are the main stylistic features in TED Talks, and that the speakers' style and rhetorical manners surpass a real properly analysed significance. However, while the display of oversimplified solutions may constitute just a glimpse of a wisely crafted 'right opinion', this readily available communication is highly appreciated by people in need of brevity.

3. Methodology

As noted above, the most suitable method to share, spread and make an idea or a theory understandable and agreeable even when seeming unintelligible or contrasted, is through argumentative discourse.

Argumentation is a systematic way to assemble information in a specific order and with deliberate technique to make it convincing. Rhetoric – being the ability at effective and persuasive speaking – is not based on sharing the logical truth about demonstrated facts, but spreading knowledge about something conceivable dealing with values and morals more than with presumptions and acknowledged truths. The aim of the following analysis is to identify rhetorical patterns of persuasion in discourse about religion, finding among them similar persuasive structures. Recurring schemata of marked linguistic features are identified as part of persuasive discourses, spoken in front of a reasonable audience whose reception is inevitably influenced by emotions and common ground of knowledge.

Along with argumentation, stylistics focuses on the persuasive style employed by speakers, retrieving recurring features of identification in a clear, replicable way.

3.1 *Argumentation*

According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's theorization of a new rhetoric[9] restored from ancient philosophy, argumentation is the linguistic discipline that deals with rational arguments uttered using non-demonstrative methods.

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[8] Anderson, *TED Talks*, XII.
[9] Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* [1969] (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame U.P., 1973).

Within the argumentative process, human reason is used to support a cause or direct a choice using purposeful words.[10] The main aim in argumentation is the adherence of an audience to a certain mind-set. Listeners are influenced into performing an action, which can be negative or positive, present or future. By listening to a speaker committed to the cause of persuasion, hearers lose their inertia and set aside their doubts while being led to the reasonableness of a definite topic.

For this very reason, whereas formal logic tries to mute emotions, "the speaker aiming at a particular action, to be carried out at an opportune time, will, on the contrary, have to excite his audience so as to produce a sufficiently strong adherence, capable of overcoming both the unavoidable apathy and the forces acting in a direction divergent from that which is desired".[11] However, adherence to an induced idea does not interfere with human reason and common sense, it does not lead to an obliteration of truthfulness. Instead of presenting an idea in hopes of the audience's acceptance, argumentation proposes a reasoned persuasion, addressing both wit and will towards not one but several existing perspectives.

There is a slight but notable difference between persuading and convincing. While the former deals with a "particular audience" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 28), the latter addresses a "universal audience" (ibid., 31), meaning all listeners endowed with reason, beyond a particular dialogic situation. Although will and wit are not absolute opposites, persuasion generally solicits actions and pragmatic responses before strict logic is involved.

Argumentation – as well as stylistics – is concerned with discourse as the marked modality through which a subject is dealt with, thus focusing on premises, audience and manner.

3.2 *Premises*

Order and technique are the trump cards in the argumentative process. Salience and "presence" (ibid., 115) of definite arguments within the text are linked to the general intent of the discourse and motivated by their pertinence to the debate. To overcome scepticism, mistrust and doubt in a potential bystander, the orator must use precise rhetorical devices and take into account some premises:

1. A discourse should start from premises well-known to the hearers;
2. Arguments should be chosen according to the discursive purpose;
3. The presentation of said arguments should be able to strike the audience's attention.[12]

Speakers dealing with persuasion should bestow the right strategic value on time, space, and powerful connection with the audience: how the speaker introduces himself, who he's referring his discourse to, as well as the overall context of utterance which he's committed to – physical, personal, and cognitive[13] – are the main prerequisites for an influential public speech.

That being the case, persuasion can easily be described as a stylistic process of 'positive shading', "a narrative modality where the narrator's desires, duties, obligations of events are foregrounded".[14] While introducing his discourse, the orator shares his psychological point of view usually through first person pronouns and "*verba sentiendi*"[15] which are those verbs defining feelings and personal

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[10] Norberto Bobbio, "Prefazione", in *Trattato dell'argomentazione. La nuova retorica* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2013), XI, my translation.
[11] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 47.
[12] Bobbio, "Prefazione", XIV, my translation.
[13] See Paul Simpson, *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).
[14] Ibid., 126.
[15] Simpson, *Stylistics*, 127.

experiences. The orator's status, his charisma and authority, as well as references to the self and to personal anecdotes, are integral parts of the structured premises and useful to ensure public engagement.

3.3 *Audience*

A hidden premise known as 'enthymeme', i.e. a discursive implicature usually understood through cultural hints and utterance conditions, may be used to create a connection with the audience. Said unspoken premises are based on a shared common ground of knowledge, presenting themselves as irrefutable, commonly agreed upon considerations. However, the speaker knows the audience he's facing. Thus, he is able to forecast his probabilities of success and also understand that they might have very different ideas from what he is going to reveal. Humour, self-deprecation and storytelling are usually the most suitable means for an alluring start.[16] Nevertheless, humour and sarcasm must be employed carefully, since at times they are too harsh and inappropriate, making people fidget or grimace, especially when an idea is not totally understood or shared. Ridicule is a double-edged sword which should be mastered with carefulness; it is employed to demean a potential opponent or a contrasting thesis, as well as to create a connection with a complacent public.[17]

Another fundamental process in trying to involve an audience is "priming", which is defined by Simpson as "the process by which one particular contextual frame becomes the main focus of attention for the reader".[18] Anderson also defines this process as "a way of nudging someone in your direction" and, using philosopher Daniel Dennett's words, it can be labelled as a set of "intuition pumps", referring to "any metaphor or linguistic device that intuitively makes a conclusion seem more plausible".[19]

Among the figures of speech employed as strategic discursive features are the so-called "figures of communion",[20] aimed at creating closeness with the audience. Here are those listed in *The New Rhetoric*:

- 'Allusion'*: indirect reference to a known or shared fact, event, or past, calling for audience's recognition;
- 'Quotation'*: citing famous authors and professionals to render the discourse authoritative and inspire recognition. Maxims, proverbs, and slogans are also quotations;
- 'Apostrophe', 'oratorical question', 'oratorical communication': 'fake' questions or assertions in which the answer is well known and not really required. The main aim is to elicit audience's engagement by making a point;
- '*Enallage* of person': 'enallage' means 'linguistic switch', it defines the usage of one grammatical form in place of another. In this case, the substitution of first or third person pronouns with second person pronoun 'you', or else the substitution of 'I' and 'you' with 'we'.[21]

3.4 *Modality and rhetorical techniques*

Argumentative discourse is highly selective, i.e. arguments are chosen according to strategic purposes, re-elaborated and interpreted by both the orator and the audience; the latter is given exegetic instruments through hints and implicatures. While introducing a definite idea, the orator first "demolishes something which is radicated in people's minds"[22] to start something new and powerful the audience is persuaded

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[16] Anderson, *TED Talks*, 56-61.
[17] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 205-206.
[18] Simpson, *Stylistics*, 91.
[19] Anderson, *TED Talks*, 89.
[20] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 187.
[21] Ibid., 177-178.
[22] Anderson, *TED Talks*, 86.

to believe in. This act of disruption is not taken for granted but is generally handled with prudence and professionalism.

As pointed out above, order and technique are fundamental for a successful discourse. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca list three possible discursive orders:

1. Order of decreasing strength;
2. Order of increasing strength;
3. Homeric or Nestorian order.[23]

In the first case, the orator anticipates his thesis by placing strong arguments at the beginning of his discourse, while in the second there is a gradual path leading towards the main assumption. As for the third case, 'Nestorian order' – from Nestor, the Homeric warrior who placed his strongest fighters on the front line and in the rear guard, leaving the weakest in the middle – means that arguments which are more solid are displayed at the beginning and at the end of the argumentative discourse, giving the right initial and final idea to the audience.

The orator's ability to master grammatical and rhetorical techniques also depends on the employment of definite styles, verb tenses, pronouns, articles, and demonstratives. There is also a distinction between the paratactic and the hypotactic styles. On the one hand, compound sentences and parataxis are used to coordinate utterances on the same level to give the public the ability to interpret and associate on their own. On the other hand, hypotaxis and complex sentences constitute the typical persuasive style, since every connection among the arguments is made through subordinate conjunctions and, therefore, said connections have been aprioristically made by the orator, who leads his public towards a certain direction.

Among the other strategic figures of speech, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca further list the so-called "figures of choice" and "figures of presence"[24], the former suggesting or imposing a choice, the latter making evident the presence of certain arguments in the text.

Figures of choice are:

- 'Oratorical definition': it emphasises some elements to make them understandable;
- 'Periphrasis': definition clarifying a concept such as synecdoche and metonymy, or antonomasia, substituting a common noun with a personal noun and vice versa;
- 'Presumptio': such as prolepsis and anticipation, aiming at substituting a characteristic that would have raised objections and issues;
- 'Reprehensio': highlighting or reiterating a definition to confirm a choice;
- 'Correctio': same as substitution (172-174).

Figures of presence are:

- 'Onomatopoeia': a word whose sound evokes an object or suggest a meaning;
- 'Anaphora': repetition of a set of words to make them foregrounded;
- 'Amplification': exaggeration or enumeration;
- 'Synonymy (metabole)', 'interpretatio': the same idea is defined through different words to reaffirm its meaning and reinforce its presence;
- 'Imaginary direct speech': ascribing something to someone in an imaginary conversation, such as in 'sermocinatio' and dialogism;

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[23] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 499.
[24] Ibid., 171.

- ‘Enallage of tense’: substituting a verb tense with another. As in ‘hypotyposis’, which is a sudden switch from past tense to present, i.e. from narration to description (174-177).

3.5 *Stylistics*

As maintained by Simpson, stylistics is a "method of textual interpretation" that focuses on language, it is "interested in language as a function of texts in context, and it acknowledges that utterances (literary or otherwise) are produced in a time, a place, and in a cultural and cognitive context".[25]

Stylistics concentrates on the recognizable verbal devices used to fashion a message, cataloguing them. Said linguistic markers can be figures of speech – metaphors, in particular, as cognitive phenomena calling for active interpretation – points of view, but also ‘foregrounding’, a technique concerning the psychological reception of a text or discourse. That is, the audience's attention is focused on the orator's point of view through the repetition, parallelism, or deviation of pronouns, articles, and other specific linguistic items.

Stylistics allows the detection of reiterated linguistic patterns used for specific purposes. In the case of persuasive speech, the employed style for both scientific and religious discourse seems to equally focus on schemes of positive shading and deontic/boulomaic modalities. As this paper aims to prove, these features enable the constitution of a common ground of reasonable assumptions no matter if the audience is constituted by atheists or devotees.

Both argumentation and stylistics pay attention to point of view and modality, which reflect the marked, motivated choices made to build a message. While ‘point of view’ – whether spatial, temporal, psychological or ideological – refers to the angle a text is written or spoken from, embodying the speaker's perspective, ‘modality’ is "the means by which a speaker's attitude towards what they are saying is conveyed".[26] The four modal systems in English are "deontic, boulomaic, epistemic and perception".[27] The ‘deontic system’ indicates the speaker's "commitment (permission, obligation and requirement) assigned to the performance of given actions" and is expressed as follows:

1. Modal auxiliary verbs (*may, should, must*);
2. Adjectival and participial patterns like "BE + deontic adjective or participle + THAT or TO" (*It is possible for you to leave; You are forbidden to leave*) (Simpson, 43-44).

The ‘boulomaic system’ deals with the communication of the speaker's wishes and desires. It is realized through these structures:

1. Modal lexical verbs (*hope, wish, regret*);
2. Adjective and participial patterns like "BE + boulomaic adjective or participle + THAT or TO" (*It is regrettable that you're leaving. It is hoped that you will leave*);
3. Modal adverbs (*hopefully, regrettably*) (Simpson, 44).

The ‘epistemic system’ concerns the addresser's commitment to a certain proposition, as "it is concerned with the speaker's confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of a proposition expressed. It is suggested by the following features:

1. Modal auxiliary verbs (You may be right);

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[25] Simpson, *Stylistics*, 2-3.

[26] Paul Simpson, *Language, Ideology and Point of View* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 35.

[27] Ibid., 43-47.

2. Modal lexical verbs (I believe you are right);
3. Modal adverbs (*arguably, maybe, perhaps, possibly, probably, certainly, supposedly, allegedly*);
4. Adjective constructions like "BE + epistemic adjective + THAT or TO" (*You are sure to be right. It's doubtful that you're right*) (Simpson, 44-45).

The 'perception system' confirms the speaker's perceived confidence in the uttered proposition. Hence, it is deeply linked to the epistemic system, being expressed as follows:

1. Modal adverbs (*clearly, obviously, evidently*);
2. Adjective constructions in "BE + perception adjective + THAT" (It is obvious that you're right) (Simpson, 45-46).

These stylistic modalities mingle and overlap with the four argumentative modalities theorized by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca as follows:

1. 'Assertive', which is the common modality of affirmation in everyday language;
2. 'Injunctive', not directly dealing with persuasion, but with imperatives and power struggle;
3. 'Interrogative', which is rhetorical, leading people towards reasoning through real or mock questions;
4. 'Optative', dealing with desires, pleas, and requests.[28]

Being linked to the addresser's point of view, the stylistic procedures of 'positive', 'negative' and 'neutral shading' can be classified in terms of modality: positive shading, where the deontic and boulomaic systems are prominent; negative shading, with marked epistemic and perception elements; neutral shading, with no modality.

4. Analysing Persuasion

Even though religion and science are generally deemed opposing concepts, argumentative discourses concerning them have equal persuasive, illocutionary force when uttered by skilled orators with the reasonable purpose of moving the audience to action. Inasmuch as a mediation between such overly controversial themes is yet out of sight, an intermediary discourse about doubt in faith is also conceivable and widely spread.

Even though the proper success of a persuasive technique would benefit from a more thorough analysis of the perlocutionary side of language – here in the excerpts briefly represented by laughter and applauses – the selected texts show the accomplishments of public speech through the substantial use of a) storytelling; b) positive modality; c) humour. These may be classified as audience-oriented techniques.

The following texts are scripts of live conferences taken from the TED website. They refer to speeches held in public by professionals trying to state their thesis while talking about sensitive topics and legitimate scepticism. Significant excerpts of said texts are chosen according to two criteria:

1. Giving a representation of opposing discourses about religion held by two eminent representatives – a scientist and a preacher – plus an in-between neutral religious speech about doubt taken from TED;

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[28] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 158-160.

2.   Proving the presence of the abovementioned argumentative styles and listed techniques and how they appear similar and have the same persuasive purposes in spite of the opposing views of the speakers.

The method of annotation divides the texts into sentences.

In text one, Richard Dawkins – a famous evolutionary biologist and fervent atheist – talks about the clash between religion and science, introducing new terms and using his sarcasm to demean the opposing thesis.

Speech two was given by Billy Graham, a renowned evangelical preacher whose powerful sermon aims to create a connection between technology and religion.

The last sample is taken from a talk given by journalist Lesley Hazleton, who uses the story of Muhammad on the mountain as an example to justify doubt in faith.

4.1 *Militant atheism* – Richard Dawkins[29]

Scientist Richard Dawkins is well-known for his opposition to creationism and for his contribution to evolutionary biology. His February 2002 TED talk is the perfect case of convincing criticism being led through sharp sarcasm and witty remarks. Dawkins' speech resembles a proper science lecture held in front of students; he's meticulous and sharp, grounding his statements on the ruins of all the religious beliefs he demolishes while speaking. He provides percentages, data and examples and uses quotations to corroborate his claims. Although his discourse is more demonstrative and assertive than interrogative, he succeeds in driving attention through his charisma.

Dawkins is also aware of his outsider status while speaking about religion and politics, "I'm not a citizen of this country, so I hope it won't be thought unbecoming if I suggest something needs to be done" (min. 18:38). With sarcasm being his main strategy during the whole discourse, Dawkins manages to accommodate his public using endearments such as "an audience as sophisticated as this one" (04:18, 4) and "elite audience" (27:21, 1).

In the first few minutes, Dawkins introduces himself, referring to his career, showing his charisma and authority through self-deprecation and the reiteration of the first-person pronoun 'I':

> 00:37
> [1] Can you understand my quaint English accent?
> 00:41
> (Laughter)
> 00:44
> [1] Like everybody else, I was entranced yesterday by the animal session. [2] Robert Full and Frans Lanting and others; the beauty of the things that they showed. [3] The only slight jarring note was when Jeffrey Katzenberg said of the mustang, "the most splendid creatures that God put on this earth." [4] Now of course, we know that he didn't really mean that, but in this country at the moment, you can't be too careful.
> 01:13
> (Laughter)
> 01:15
> [1] I'm a biologist, and the central theorem of our subject: the theory of design, Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. [2] In professional circles everywhere, it's of course universally accepted. In non-professional circles outside America, it's largely ignored. [3] But in non-professional circles within America, it arouses so much hostility –

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[29] www.ted.com/talks/richard_dawkins_militant_atheism/transcript.

01:44
(Laughter)
01:45
[1] it's fair to say that American biologists are in a state of war. [2] The war is so worrying at present, with court cases coming up in one state after another, that I felt I had to say something about it.
01:58
[1] If you want to know what I have to say about Darwinism itself, I'm afraid you're going to have to look at my books, which you won't find in the bookstore outside.

In addition to the use of 'I', he employs 'allusions' (00:44, 1-4; 01:45, 1) to appear self-possessed and funny and an 'oratorical question' (00:37, 1) to elicit the audience's engagement – also signalled by the *enallage* 'I/we' (00:44, 4). He doesn't go straight to the point but uses the strategy of focusing on funny facts to put everyone at ease. While being generic to engage the audience, Dawkins' assertive tone soon evolves into a deontic system (01:45, 2; 01:58, 1).

As the script points out (laughter at 00:41, 01:13, 01:44; then at 04:08, 04:51, 05:00, 05:02, 06:17, 06:22), in public speech the perlocutionary side of language – which deals with the effect of the speech upon the audience – is fundamental to understand whether the speaker's persuasive purpose is being successful.

At min. 00:44, 3-4 and in the following statement, "Creationists, lacking any coherent scientific argument for their case, fall back on the popular phobia against atheism: Teach your children evolution in biology class, and they'll soon move on to drugs, grand larceny and sexual 'pre-version'" (03:11), Dawkins ridicules his counterpart by showing the absurdity of their assertions through 'exaggeration' and 'allusion' to perversion through a mock term.

04:03
[1] But here, I want to say something nice about creationists. [2] It's not a thing I often do, so listen carefully.
04:08
(Laughter)
04:10
[1] I think they're right about one thing. [2] I think they're right that evolution is fundamentally hostile to religion.
04:18
[1] I've already said that many individual evolutionists, like the Pope, are also religious, but I think they're deluding themselves. [2] I believe a true understanding of Darwinism is deeply corrosive to religious faith. [3] Now, it may sound as though I'm about to preach atheism, and I want to reassure you that that's not what I'm going to do. [4] In an audience as sophisticated as this one, that would be preaching to the choir.
04:48
[1] No, what I want to urge upon you --
04:51
(Laughter)
04:55
[1] Instead, what I want to urge upon you is militant atheism.
05:00
(Laughter)
05:02
(Applause)
05:05

[1] But that's putting it too negatively. [2] If I was a person who were interested in preserving religious faith, I would be very afraid of the positive power of evolutionary science, and indeed science generally, but evolution in particular, to inspire and enthrall, precisely because it is atheistic.
05:28
[1] Living creatures are too complex to have come about by chance; therefore, they must have had a designer. [2] This argument of course, shoots itself in the foot. [3] Any designer capable of designing something really complex has to be even more complex himself, and that's before we even start on the other things he's expected to do, like forgive sins, bless marriages, listen to prayers – favor our side in a war –
06:17
(Laughter)
06:19
[1] disapprove of our sex lives, and so on.
06:22
(Laughter)
06:24
[1] Complexity is the problem that any theory of biology has to solve, and you can't solve it by postulating an agent that is even more complex, thereby simply compounding the problem. [2] Darwinian natural selection is so stunningly elegant because it solves the problem of explaining complexity in terms of nothing but simplicity … [3] But here, I only want to make the point that the elegance of Darwinism is corrosive to religion, precisely because it is so elegant, so parsimonious, so powerful, so economically powerful.

The hypothesis at 05:05, 2 and the sarcastic remark at 05:28, 3 function as 'intuition pumps' to prepare the audience, to prove the wrongness of a point, in this case the reason behind ancient faith. Sarcasm is not only a rhetorical strategy used to mock and impress, but also to create communion with the bystanders through unspoken premises. Dawkins' way of speaking is self-referential but also manipulative, his utterances being set in a hypotactic style full of subordinative conjunctions such as 'if', 'but', 'therefore', 'thereby', 'because'. I.e., Dawkins' reasoning is astutely delivered to the public through slight grammatical changes, such as conjunctions and verbs, but also through the narration of personal experiences and authoritative quotations supporting his thesis.

While presenting the counterpart's certainties, Dawkins immediately disrupts their tentative arguments by contrasting creationism with Darwinism, using a series of biased adjectives describing what he clearly finds more endearing and conceivable about science (from 06:44 on): "stunningly elegant", "parsimonious", "powerful", "economically powerful". "I want" (04:03,1; 04:18, 3; 04:48, 1; 04:55, 1) signals a passage to a boulomaic stylistic modality. The speaker is projecting his desires, but also his beliefs through *verba sentiendi* "I think" and "I believe" (04:10, 1; 04:18, 1-2). This, along with the perlocutionary elements, signals that Dawkins is very much 'present' in his own speech, with his ideas and convictions, and very much aware of his audience, often called into an interactive exchange.

In the next part Dawkins quotes writer Douglas Adams, denouncing the social taboo according to which nothing can be said to further explain or counterstrike religious assertions.

08:21
[1] I quote, [1a] "Religion doesn't seem to work like that. It has certain ideas at the heart of it, which we call 'sacred' or 'holy.' What it means is: here is an idea or a notion that you're not allowed to say anything bad about. You're just not. Why not? Because you're not."
08:40
(Laughter)
…
09:31

[1] In my view, not only is science corrosive to religion; religion is corrosive to science. [2] It teaches people to be satisfied with trivial, supernatural non-explanations, and blinds them to the wonderful, real explanations that we have within our grasp. [3] It teaches them to accept authority, revelation and faith, instead of always insisting on evidence.

By showing his ideological point of view (09:31) Dawkins strengthens his thesis, which is how absurd and unconceivable religious claims are, by talking about the severe clash between religion and science. Religion is charged with obtuse stagnation, and identified as a notion that does not change through time, while science is ready to take chances and modify itself in light of new discoveries.

Another issue emerging from Dawkins' speech is the definition "atheist":

12:59
[1] In practice, what is an atheist? [2] An atheist is just somebody who feels about Yahweh the way any decent Christian feels about Thor or Baal or the golden calf. [3] As has been said before, we are all atheists about most of the gods that humanity has ever believed in. [4] Some of us just go one god further.
13:22
(Laughter)
13:25
(Applause)
13:32
[1] And however we define atheism, it's surely the kind of academic belief that a person is entitled to hold without being vilified as an unpatriotic, unelectable non-citizen. [2] Nevertheless, it's an undeniable fact that to own up to being an atheist is tantamount to introducing yourself as Mr. Hitler or Miss Beelzebub. [3] And that all stems from the perception of atheists as some kind of weird, way-out minority.

The use of oratorical questions (12:59, 1) and the massive *enallage* towards 'we' and 'us' (13:32) serve as means to engage the audience. Resistance to the concept of atheism is later overcome through the employment of synonyms, such as "agnostic" (20:23), "humanist" (24:00), "naturalist" (24:22) and, finally, "non-theist" (25:02):

25:02
[1] I think the best of the available alternatives for "atheist" is simply "non-theist." [2] It lacks the strong connotation that there's definitely no God, and it could therefore easily be embraced by teapot or tooth-fairy agnostics. [3] It's completely compatible with the God of the physicists. [4] When atheists like Stephen Hawking and Albert Einstein use the word "God," they use it of course as a metaphorical shorthand for that deep, mysterious part of physics which we don't yet understand. [5] "Non-theist" will do for all that, yet unlike "atheist," it doesn't have the same phobic, hysterical responses. [6] But I think, actually, the alternative is to grasp the nettle of the word "atheism" itself, precisely because it is a taboo word, carrying frissons of hysterical phobia. [7] Critical mass may be harder to achieve with the word "atheist" than with the word "non-theist," or some other non-confrontational word.
…
26:16
[1] Now, I said that if I were religious, I'd be very afraid of evolution – I'd go further: I would fear science in general, if properly understood. [2] And this is because the scientific worldview is so much more exciting, more poetic, more filled with sheer wonder than anything in the poverty-stricken arsenals of the religious imagination.
…
27:21

[1] Now, this is an elite audience, and I would therefore expect about 10 percent of you to be religious. [2] Many of you probably subscribe to our polite cultural belief that we should respect religion. [3] But I also suspect that a fair number of those secretly despise religion as much as I do.
27:45
(Laughter)
27:47
[1] If you're one of them, and of course many of you may not be, but if you are one of them, I'm asking you to stop being polite, come out, and say so. [2] And if you happen to be rich, give some thought to ways in which you might make a difference. [3] The religious lobby in this country is massively financed by foundations – to say nothing of all the tax benefits – by foundations, such as the Templeton Foundation and the Discovery Institute. [4] We need an anti-Templeton to step forward. [5] If my books sold as well as Stephen Hawking's books, instead of only as well as Richard Dawkins' books, I'd do it myself.
28:31
[1] People are always going on about, "How did September the 11th change you?"
28:38
[1] Well, here's how it changed me.
28:41
[1] Let's all stop being so damned respectful.

Again, the prompting hypothesis at 26:16, 1 and the biased praising pre-modifiers of science against religion (Ibid., 2) are used to show ridicule towards believers; these are followed by a series of directives to call the audience into action against "the religious lobby", with a continuous *enallage* 'I/we' (27:47). This last segment is totally injunctive in style and even harsher (27:47, 1; 28:41, 1), as the orator tries to instruct his audience to do something after having listened to all this evidence against ridiculous assumptions and naïve beliefs without logical explanation. Thus, while Dawkins goes on celebrating science with an adjectival amplification (26:16, 2), he also demeans the counterpart with sharp adjectives (Ibid.).

Being a scientist, even if persuasive discourse itself is not always logical and demonstrative, Dawkins conceives an authentic science class with a precise scheme of data. The passage deontic-boulomaic and the use of *verba sentiendi* demonstrates that this argumentative style is highly marked by positive shading, rendering Dawkins fully committed to the main topic.

It can be assumed he's using an order of increasing strength, in which he manages to avoid disappointment and frustration through sarcastic engagement and continuous '*enallage* of person'. He does not really acknowledge an antithesis with supporting evidence, if not to hint at it to demolish it harshly by showing its ridiculousness.

4.2 *On technology and faith* – Billy Graham[30]

While Richard Dawkins' discursive strategy is using bald sarcasm over tolerance, Billy Graham's speech is strongly based on a placid confrontation between science and religion, aiming at encouraging a diplomatic compromise between them.

Billy Graham was one of the most famous and prolific contemporary evangelical preachers, with his inspiring sermons being broadcast on television, radio, and even on the Internet. In his 1998 TED talk, with a meek approach, showing his authenticity and sympathetic feelings, Graham expressed his own admiration for the recent technological discoveries, trying to find a happy medium to make both technology and faith conceivable and acceptable.

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[30] www.ted.com/talks/billy_graham_on_technology_and_faith/transcript.

00:25
[1] As a clergyman, you can imagine how out of place I feel. [2] I feel like a fish out of water, or maybe an owl out of the air.
00:37
(Laughter)
00:40
[1] I was preaching in San Jose some time ago, and my friend Mark Kvamme, who helped introduce me to this conference, brought several CEOs and leaders of some of the companies here in the Silicon Valley to have breakfast with me, or I with them. [2] And I was so stimulated. [2a] And had such – it was an eye-opening experience to hear them talk about the world that is yet to come through technology and science. [3] I know that we're near the end of this conference, and some of you may be wondering why they have a speaker from the field of religion.
…
01:40
[1] But some years ago I was on an elevator in Philadelphia, coming down. [2] I was to address a conference at a hotel. [3] And on that elevator a man said, "I hear Billy Graham is staying in this hotel." [3a] And another man looked in my direction and said, "Yes, there he is. He's on this elevator with us." [3b] And this man looked me up and down for about 10 seconds, and he said, "My, what an anticlimax!"
…
03:39
[1] I know that as you have been peering into the future, and as we've heard some of it here tonight, I would like to live in that age and see what is going to be. [2] But I won't, because I'm 80 years old. [3] This is my eightieth year, and I know that my time is brief. [3] I have phlebitis at the moment, in both legs, and that's the reason that I had to have a little help in getting up here, because I have Parkinson's disease in addition to that, and some other problems that I won't talk about.
04:15
(Laughter)

Graham's discourse starts with a 'presumptio' (00:25): showing authentic vulnerability and embarrassment, he admits the weakness of being a clergyman in a scientific context, in order to avoid possible objections. This results in an immediate sympathy within the audience – as shown by the perlocutionary response (00:37, 04:15). The account of his life through storytelling and 'imaginary direct speech' (01:40, 3-3a-3b) is not self-referential but aimed at showing his being out of place in front of an audience accustomed to scientific discourses. His bitter humour in the form of assertives (03:39) serves to elicit an empathic response. Trying to soothe a potentially hostile public, Graham employs a plain paratactic style, with single sentences and coordinating conjunctions 'and', reiterated to let the bystanders draw their own conclusions about his thesis. The massive use of parataxis is evident in the following segment, where Graham's strategy of cutting the sentence, in order to make them shorter, simpler to understand and apparently separate, helps to put the audience at ease:

04:17
[1] But this is not the first time that we've had a technological revolution … [2] And there's one that I want to talk about. [3] In one generation, the nation of the people of Israel had a tremendous and dramatic change that made them a great power in the Near East. [4] A man by the name of David came to the throne, and King David became one of the great leaders of his generation. [5] He was a man of tremendous leadership … [6] He was a brilliant poet, philosopher, writer, soldier – with strategies in battle and conflict that people study even today.

Here Graham starts to slowly veer into his main assumption by storytelling the biblical King David's life, creating a 'simile' between David's doing and the outcome of modern technological revolutions.

Choosing a discursive order of increasing strength, the orator places his mentions of an antithesis right at the beginning of the text, and then goes on with arguments in support of his own beliefs.

> 06:37
> [1] There were many problems still left. [2] And they're still with us, and you haven't solved them, and I haven't heard anybody here speak to that. [3] How do we solve these three problems that I'd like to mention? [4] The first one that David saw was human evil. [5] Where does it come from? [6] How do we solve it? [7] Over again and again in the Psalms, which Gladstone said was the greatest book in the world, David describes the evils of the human race. [8] And yet he says, "He restores my soul." [9] Have you ever thought about what a contradiction we are? [10] On one hand, we can probe the deepest secrets of the universe and dramatically push back the frontiers of technology, as this conference vividly demonstrates. [11] We've seen under the sea, three miles down, or galaxies hundreds of billions of years out in the future.
>
> 07:46
> [1] But on the other hand, something is wrong. [2] Our battleships, our soldiers, are on a frontier now, almost ready to go to war with Iraq. [3] Now, what causes this? [3a] Why do we have these wars in every generation, and in every part of the world? [3b] And revolutionist? [4] We can't get along with other people, even in our own families. [5] We find ourselves in the paralyzing grip of self-destructive habits we can't break. [6] Racism and injustice and violence sweep our world, bringing a tragic harvest of heartache and death. [7] Even the most sophisticated among us seem powerless to break this cycle. [8] I would like to see Oracle take up that, or some other technological geniuses work on this.
> …
> 09:08
> [1] The Bible says the problem is within us, within our hearts and our souls. [2] Our problem is that we are separated from our Creator, which we call God, and we need to have our souls restored, something only God can do. [3] Jesus said, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts: murders, sexual immorality, theft, false testimonies, slander." [4] The British philosopher Bertrand Russell was not a religious man, but he said, "It's in our hearts that the evil lies, and it's from our hearts that it must be plucked out." [5] Albert Einstein – I was just talking to someone, when I was speaking at Princeton, and I met Mr. Einstein. [6] He didn't have a doctor's degree, because he said nobody was qualified to give him one.
> 10:07
> (Laughter)

In this excerpt, Graham acknowledges the existence of an opposing thesis with the periphrasis at 06:37, 10-11 and 07:28. From the very beginning, the orator has even shown admiration towards scientific discoveries (00:40, 2-2a).

Nevertheless, he also employs 'figures of communion' such as 'oratorical questions' trying to convince his public of what will say next. References to everyday issues, such as war, bad habits, racism, injustice, and violence, are 'intuition pumps' directing the bystanders towards Graham's aimed direction. Among all the possibilities and certainties given by science and demonstrated facts, the orator shows that something dealing with unrestricted values goes beyond the formal logic. The '*enallage* of person', exemplified by the passage from individual 'I' to inclusive 'we', urges the involvement of the audience in the following religious arguments.

Furthermore, quotations of illustrious men of science such as Albert Einstein and, later, Blaise Pascal (20:46), are used to create a common ground of mutual understanding, to inspire recognition among the hearers, who are led to believe that what Graham is saying about faith has been accepted even by illuminated and well-known scientists:

10:11
[1] But he made this statement. [2] He said, "It's easier to denature plutonium than to denature the evil spirit of man." [3] And many of you, I'm sure, have thought about that and puzzled over it. [4] You've seen people take beneficial technological advances, such as the Internet we've heard about tonight, and twist them into something corrupting. [5] You've seen brilliant people devise computer viruses that bring down whole systems … [6] The problem is not technology. [7] The problem is the person or persons using it. King David said that he knew the depths of his own soul. [8] He couldn't free himself from personal problems and personal evils that included murder and adultery. [9] Yet King David sought God's forgiveness, and said, "You can restore my soul."
11:14
[1] You see, the Bible teaches that we're more than a body and a mind. [1a] We are a soul. [1b] And there's something inside of us that is beyond our understanding. [1c] That's the part of us that yearns for God, or something more than we find in technology. [2] Your soul is that part of you that yearns for meaning in life, and which seeks for something beyond this life. [3] It's the part of you that yearns, really, for God.

By admitting "The problem is not technology. The problem is the person or persons using it" (10:52), Graham finally states his thesis and, at the same time, grants room for manoeuvre to those who also believe in science and technology. They are not opposites. He maintains that there is something beyond comprehension, something that lies outside the bodily constraints and cannot be explained through rationality.

The use of personal and possessive pronouns *we*, *us*, *our* (04:17, 1-2; 06:37, 2-3-6-10-11; 07:46, 2-3a-4-5-6-9; 09:08, 1-2; 10:11, 4; 11:14, 1-1a-1b-1c) shows the speaker's effort to engage the audience. But more than that, the use of exclusive 'you' renders the audience the absolute protagonist of the story, endowing them with full importance (06:37, 2; 10:11, 3-4-5; 11:14, 1-2-3; 24:37, 2). Thus, the author intentionally put himself in the shadows, showing commitment through storytelling but not through a bald positive shading (neither of the four modality systems are stressed). The real protagonist of the story is the audience as the imaginary characters, called into action through reiterated oratorical questions (06:37 3-5-6-9; 07:46, 3-3a-3b-9; 24:37, 4). Furthermore, these questions function as foregrounded points for the audience, whose attention is driven to them because they help the slow process of induce their reasoning.

Graham's discourse is a spiralling scheme proceeding towards a non-logical demonstration. His chosen argumentative modality is a wise mixture of assertion – as he was reporting a parable – and interrogation – always oratorical and engaging. It is a gradual exploration that persuades people through kindness, understanding, personal experience, acceptance of opposing assumptions and significant quotations, which are his main strategies. Once again, in the epilogue Graham refers to his own story, since he believes his happy outcome with faith could serve as an incentive to believe. There is no strong and definite assumption – thus a neutral shading since the choice is always left to the individual – the audience – who is the true determining protagonist of every choice of faith:

24:37
[1] One day, I was faced face-to-face with Christ. [2] He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." Can you imagine that? "I am the truth. I'm the embodiment of all truth." [3] He was a liar. [3a] Or he was insane. [3b] Or he was what he claimed to be. [4] Which was he? [5] I had to make that decision. [5a] I couldn't prove it. [5b] I couldn't take it to a laboratory and experiment with it. [6] But by faith I said, I believe him, and he came into my heart and changed my life. [7] And now I'm ready, when I hear that call, to go into the presence of God.

4.3 *The doubt essential to faith* – Lesley Hazleton[31]

Lesley Hazleton worked as a reporter in the Middle East. She's an agnostic who dealt with religion from an objective point of view while writing Muhammad and other sacred personalities' biographies. In her papers and lectures, Hazleton looks at mystery, science, and religion with optimism and pragmatism, embodying everyone's hesitations about sensitive topics and unshared ideas[32].

Even though her TED talk is shorter than the previous ones, it is possibly the most striking for its meaning and final purpose: demonstrating how faith is possible if doubt becomes its indivisible part.

> 00:00
> [1] Writing biography is a strange thing to do. [2] It's a journey into the foreign territory of somebody else's life, a journey, an exploration that can take you places you never dreamed of going and still can't quite believe you've been, especially if, like me, you're an agnostic Jew and the life you've been exploring is that of Muhammad.
> 00:29
> [1] Five years ago, for instance, I found myself waking each morning in misty Seattle to what I knew was an impossible question: [2] What actually happened one desert night, half the world and almost half of history away? [2a] What happened, that is, on the night in the year 610 when Muhammad received the first revelation of the Koran on a mountain just outside Mecca? [3] This is the core mystical moment of Islam, and as such, of course, it defies empirical analysis. [4] Yet the question wouldn't let go of me. [5] I was fully aware that for someone as secular as I am, just asking it could be seen as pure chutzpah. (Laughter) [5a] And I plead guilty as charged, because all exploration, physical or intellectual, is inevitably in some sense an act of transgression, of crossing boundaries.

First, Hazleton presents herself and her work *in media res*, i.e. without verbose periphrasis, going straight to her work as a biographer, which is the starting point to her thesis and the reason why she thought about faith while being a "secular" (01:18) creature. She gives a meaningful premise to her discourse: since the title announces it will be about faith and she declares her agnosticism, she also wins public favour by saying even the unbelieving materialists can listen to a speech about faith. Thus, the audience is considerably widened through an inclusive strategy.

The '*enallage* of person' and direct reference to the bystanders with confidential, direct address 'you' allows an immediate communion with the public, who is presumably disoriented and sceptical. Hazleton chooses an order of increasing strength with a comprehensible preamble uttered before the main thesis. 'Oratorical questions' (00:29, 2, 2A) and humour followed by laughter (Ibid., 5) are used as 'figures of communion'. At min. 00:29 the beginning of the storytelling section marks a shift towards the main argument through an '*enallage* of tense', from present to past, i.e. from description to narration:

> 01:57
> [1] Which might be why when I looked at the earliest accounts we have of that night, what struck me even more than what happened was what did not happen. [2] Muhammad did not come floating off the mountain as though walking on air. [2a] He did not run down shouting, "Hallelujah!" and "Bless the Lord!" [2b] He did not radiate light and joy. [3] There were no choirs of angels, no music of the spheres, no elation, no ecstasy, no golden aura surrounding him, no sense of an absolute, fore-ordained role as the messenger of God. [3a] That is, he did none of the things that might make it easy to cry foul, to put down the whole story as a pious fable. [3b] Quite the contrary. [4] In his own reported words, he was convinced at first that what had happened couldn't have been real. [5] At best, he thought, it had to have been a hallucination -- a trick of the eye or the ear, perhaps, or his

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[31] www.ted.com/talks/lesley_hazleton_the_doubt_essential_to_faith/transcript.
[32] For further information see www.ted.com/speakers/lesley_hazleton.

own mind working against him. [5a] At worst, possession – that he'd been seized by an evil jinn, a spirit out to deceive him, even to crush the life out of him. [6] In fact, he was so sure that he could only be majnun, possessed by a jinn, that when he found himself still alive, his first impulse was to finish the job himself, to leap off the highest cliff and escape the terror of what he'd experienced by putting an end to all experience.
03:47
[1] So the man who fled down the mountain that night trembled not with joy but with a stark, primordial fear. [2] He was overwhelmed not with conviction, but by doubt. [3] And that panicked disorientation, that sundering of everything familiar, that daunting awareness of something beyond human comprehension, can only be called a terrible awe.
04:22
[1] Yet whether you're a rationalist or a mystic, whether you think the words Muhammad heard that night came from inside himself or from outside, what's clear is that he did experience them, and that he did so with a force that would shatter his sense of himself and his world and transform this otherwise modest man into a radical advocate for social and economic justice.

The 'imaginary direct speech' at 01:57, 2a allows to make Muhammad more as a plausible character in Hazleton's story. While the other speeches are set on an inevitable contrast – further motivated by the very profession of the speakers – Hazleton's always gives alternatives and makes comparison, leading the audience towards a certain goal, but also leaving full freedom of choice (01:57, 5-5a; 04:22, 1). Her discourse truly is all-encompassing.

Through her reporter experience, light sarcasm, meaningful pre-modifiers (03:47, 3), and the continuous passage from descriptive present to narrative past, she acknowledges the difficulties of believing in something without logical foundation. Reiterated 'antithesis' at 03:47, 1-2-3 function as the pivotal, foregrounded point in Hazleton's storytelling. The reason behind a rightful doubt in faith is justified by the fact that Muhammad himself was scared. The discourse is apparently paratactic, and yet sentences are linked together to make the story more immersive. As the epitome of authoritative quotation, she gives the example of one of the most famous religious representants, of his fear and disbelief, to make plausible the uneasiness of doubt. Hence, she states her thesis:

05:32
[1] Yet what, exactly, is imperfect about doubt? [2] As I read those early accounts, I realized it was precisely Muhammad's doubt that brought him alive for me, that allowed me to begin to see him in full, to accord him the integrity of reality. [3] And the more I thought about it, the more it made sense that he doubted, because doubt is essential to faith.

The next excerpts are all arguments displayed in favour of the main assumption, giving once again the final example of an eminent religious person to justify fallacious human nature, which is made of decisions and retreats, trusted facts and changing opinions:

06:36
[1] If this seems a startling idea at first, consider that doubt, as Graham Greene once put it, is the heart of the matter. [2] Abolish all doubt, and what's left is not faith, but absolute, heartless conviction. [3] You're certain that you possess the Truth – inevitably offered with an implied uppercase T – and this certainty quickly devolves into dogmatism and righteousness, by which I mean a demonstrative, overweening pride in being so very right, in short, the arrogance of fundamentalism.
…
09:37
[1] This isn't faith. It's fanaticism, and we have to stop confusing the two. [2] We have to recognize that real faith has no easy answers. [3] It's difficult and stubborn. [4] It involves an ongoing

struggle, a continual questioning of what we think we know, a wrestling with issues and ideas. It goes hand in hand with doubt, in a never-ending conversation with it, and sometimes in conscious defiance of it.
10:14
[1] And this conscious defiance is why I, as an agnostic, can still have faith. [2] I have faith, for instance, that peace in the Middle East is possible despite the ever-accumulating mass of evidence to the contrary. [3] I'm not convinced of this. [4] I can hardly say I believe it. [5] I can only have faith in it, commit myself, that is, to the idea of it, and I do this precisely because of the temptation to throw up my hands in resignation and retreat into silence.
10:53
[1] Because despair is self-fulfilling. [2] If we call something impossible, we act in such a way that we make it so. And I, for one, refuse to live that way. [3] In fact, most of us do, whether we're atheist or theist or anywhere in between or beyond, for that matter, what drives us is that, despite our doubts and even because of our doubts, we reject the nihilism of despair. [4] We insist on faith in the future and in each other. [5] Call this naive if you like. [6] Call it impossibly idealistic if you must. [7] But one thing is sure: Call it human.

Directive speech acts at 06:36, 1-2 are employed to engage a now predisposed audience induced into a joined effort at reasoning. Min. 09:37 further proves Hazleton's discourse to be more convincing than persuading, for the very reason that it is about doubt, thus placing itself in the grey zone between faith and atheism where a choice is still left uncertain. She slowly and consciously drives the audience towards a reasoned conclusion through foregrounded 'anaphora' (10:53, 5-6-7). The use of modal verbs (10:14, 1-4-5) demonstrates the employment of a deontic system, i.e. Hazleton's point of view and commitment after enucleating her reasons are expressed through giving herself permission to believe. Hazleton's discourse is a well-built compendium, a happy medium between the other two: if Dawkins was relentless and sarcastic, and Graham tolerant and cautious, Hazleton is both. There's even an almost perfect equilibrium between 'parataxis' ("and", commas) and 'hypotaxis' ("yet", "and yet", "but", "for instance", "that is", "whether", "because"). Her argumentative modality oscillates among assertive, interrogative, and even optative hints ("This isn't faith. It's fanaticism, and we have to stop confusing the two. We have to recognize that real faith has no easy answers", min 09:37), being thoroughly journalistic.

5. Conclusions

Religious discourse is not always polite and tolerant, nor are its representatives and its opponents. It is mostly unforgiving and inexorable as long as antithetic ideas will thrive and dispute.

The stylistic analysis of these texts demonstrates that, in spite of their different points of view, the speakers all narrate personal experiences and employ humour and positive sharing modalities in order to elicit consent. In particular, Dawkins, Graham and Hazleton use:

1) Storytelling;
2) Hypothesis and oratorical questions as psychological prompts;
3) The '*enallage* of person' 'I/we' for audience involvement;
4) An order of increasing strength;
5) An alternation between assertive and interrogative argumentative modalities.

While some stylistic oscillations – especially in parataxis and hypotaxis – serve as means to preserve the speakers' different thesis, the use of the same reiterated techniques further demonstrates how religious discourses benefit from the same persuasive modalities in spite of their internal differences. There are many ways, more or less persuasive, or even manipulative, to inspire conviction and trust in

a willing audience, even when the main assumptions are thorny and conflicted. It can be achieved through cunning sarcasm – as for Richards Dawkins' vehement harangue, full of hypotactic, induced reasoning – or through meek understanding – as for Billy Graham's sermon-like discourse, where bystanders are not stricken with sheer force, but persuaded with the promise of peace.

Whatever the means, public adherence is always accomplished, whether in a positive or negative way, and a consequential action, i.e. their commitment to one particular cause, is the desirable outcome of such heartfelt discursive confrontations. Persuasion counts many strategies in its arsenal and it is deeply linked to the shared commitment of the speaker to his/her own motifs.

However, faith can also be philosophically and linguistically bipolar and undecided. Religious discourse can drive people towards strong beliefs with equally strong, definite arguments, choosing foregrounded figures of speech to draw attention to the presence of an argument or the availability of a choice or even through an affective link with the orator. At the same time, it can lead towards doubt and a middle ground of an all-embracing confrontation through rhetorical questions and authoritative storytelling, as in Lesley Hazleton's speech.

Especially in this last case, the audience will always be the preferred interpreter of clear directives or implicated psychological prompts. Hearers can follow a reasonable path of explanatory arguments, but they have the right and the intellectual means to understand and take a stand, even if it's not a definite one, even when it's emotional, changing, and open to dialogue and further analysis. This openness is what makes persuasive discourse possible, always aimed at inspiring new concepts, leading to new actions and flourishing with changing ideas.