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# PROLEGOMENON TO A PRAGMATICS OF EMOTION

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*Abstract:*

This paper begins the development of a pragmatics of emotion based on the pragma-dialectical programme, Externalization, Socialization, Functionalization, and Dialectification, applied to the emotional mode of argumentation. The first step points out a systematic equivocation within pragma-dialectics between the notion of argument and that of 'dialectics.' With this cleared, it is shown that each of the first three main assumptions can be altered to accommodate a non-logical mode of communication. However, dialectification, insofar as it is actually defining of the dialectical mode, must be created anew. A defining assumption for emotionality is presented as a replacement for dialectification.

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One of the most important contributions to Argumentation Theory in the past few decades has been the Pragma-Dialectic approach led by van Eemeren and Grootendorst of the Amsterdam School. This programme presents a systematic theory intended to provide an analytical framework through which one can reconstruct and normatively investigate ordinary argumentative communication. The emphasis is very strongly on a 'critical-rational' approach which relies on a language-based analysis: "Argumentative discourse should be studied as a specimen of normal verbal communication and interaction, and it should, at the same time, be measured against a certain standard of reasonableness" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst. 1992, p. 5).

I have argued elsewhere (Gilbert, 1996) that arguments must be considered emotional as well as logical interactions, and, indeed, that other modes, specifically the visceral (physical) and kisceral (intuitive, mystical,) ought be included as well. I will not, in this talk, reiterate those arguments for the importance of taking emotion seriously as an integral component of argument analysis. Rather, I would like to try and move the programme forward by determining to what extent the emotional mode can be modeled or, better, viewed within the Pragma-Dialectic framework. I will argue in the first two parts that, to a fair extent, and by making only some very obvious and interesting changes, the pragma-dialectic approach can be applied to emotional argumentation in a useful way. In the final section I will present a principle that will permit further analogies to be developed. Throughout, I will be attempting to show that 1] dealing with emotions is an ordinary and integral aspect of argument analysis and or arguing itself; and, 2] dealing with emotions require similar interpretive and analytical skills as does dealing logically.[1](#)

## *The Four Pragma-Dialectic Foundations*

The four foundations of the pragma-dialectic approach are externalization, functionalization, socialization, and

dialectification. In this section I will examine each of these to determine the effect of moving to the emotional mode.

Socialization is the assumption that argumentative communication occurs between two or more persons, and that argument is essentially interactive as opposed to a series of static reasonings. For this reason, the arguments offered and reasons presented must be put before one's partner: "A speaker engaging in argumentation addresses himself in principle to *another language user* who is supposed to assume the position of rational judge" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1984). So argumentation on the socialization assumption is inherently interactive and communicative.

Externalization, it is explained, means that the Argumentation Theorist starts off by dealing "with what people have expressed, implicitly or explicitly, instead of speculating about what they think or believe" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1992, p. 10). But, of course, an arguer's words are not sufficient to express meanings or communicate messages. We speak enthymematically, we communicate non-linguistically. The self-same words can have completely different meanings depending on how and when and where they are delivered. But, we are admonished, "it is important to bear in mind that one is dealing with thoughts or ideas *deduced from the speaker's statements* by abstracting from a particular form of expression" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1984, p. 6). Clearly, however, some of these "statements" need to be contextual clues or inherently attached to contextual clues in order to be interpreted and understood as the messages they are. The common use of irony alone is sufficient to warrant this claim.

So socialization requires that we be involved in a communicative interaction which externalization demands be based primarily on explicitly or implicitly expressed assertions. The question then becomes, *can emotions be understood as expressions?* In other words, if linguistic assertions form the core for information communicated in the logical mode, can emotional expressions do the same for the emotional mode? And, the answer is, of course, yes. In fact, even the very phrasing, the connection of 'expression' and 'emotion' is common parlance within the language. We "express emotions" all the time, and most certainly in many argumentative interactions. Often, it is the expression of emotion, to one degree or another, that clarifies the linguistic communication. Consider the following sentence.

Example *You're Right*

"Fine, fine, you're right, I'm wrong, we'll do it your way,"

This sentence can indicate agreement with what has been said if presented flatly and intended sincerely, or, if accompanied by an expression of anger, it can mean that the respondent does not agree at all, but is capitulating. Virtually all native speakers will be able to tell the difference.<sup>2</sup> And, it is the emotion that is being used to establish the correct interpretation of the sentence. That is, *the message integrally includes the emotional component*, and it must be used in order to decipher the meaning of the message.

Externalization, then, outlines an analogous requirement—we cannot guess or impugn emotions to a dispute partner unless those emotions have been expressed. Once we have that expression, then the emotions become part and parcel of the argumentation, and we interpret their impact according to the usual rules for understanding emotions.

It is important to note that one may speculate about the existence of unexpressed or dark-side emotions as much as one may conjecture as to dark-side reasons or positions one's partner may hold. In actual argumentation a disputant often suspects that a partner holds some view or other, and might well attempt to bring it out or entice

the partner into expressing a commitment to it. Similarly, one might suspect that a partner harbours anger or fear and so provide opportunities for these emotions to become exposed. However, just as one cannot, according to the assumption of Externalization, impugn unstated reasons or claims to an opponent, so one cannot ascribe hidden emotions that have not been expressed.

The next feature of the Pragma-Dialectic approach is "functionalization." That is, argumentation is treated as a "purposive activity." On the Pragma-Dialectic analysis, the purpose of the interaction is the logical investigation of a standpoint with each partner taking a Pro or Contra stance. This, on their model implies a verbal exchange involving language. In the emotional mode there is certainly language, though not necessarily verbal. Emotional language includes body language, tonality, and other common indicators of emotional states. Again, one must remember that language devoid of context and situation is every bit as meaningless as is a series of gestures taken in isolation.

Emotions serve a crucial purpose, they serve to communicate to one's dispute partner the degree of commitment, concern, and feeling one has about a given standpoint. Further, they can indicate that a given standpoint is connected to other pressing matters that must be examined before the argumentation can begin to be resolved. In my theory of Coalescent Argumentation (Gilbert, 1997), which is highly resolution-oriented, the idea that an argumentation may lead from superficial matters to other deeper considerations is central.

The final foundation for the Pragma-Dialectic approach is dialectification. It is at the heart of the critical-logical approach, and is explained as follows.

A fourth feature of our approach to argumentation is the stress we place on *dialectification*. If a language user advances argumentation in defence of a standpoint he advances a constellation of statements calculated either to justify or to refute an expressed opinion. The language user addresses another language user who is supposed to adopt the position of a rational judge and who reacts to the argumentation critically, so that a critical discussion ensues. (1984, p. 15)

More than any other assumption, dialectification stresses the logical, linear basis of the Pragma-Dialectic programme. And here the differences between the various modes becomes crucial. In the emotional mode we do not want or demand to emphasize the linguistic—much emotional information is provided either through linguistically indirect components, e.g., tone of voice, or through actions and body language. Mind you, it is possible to speak in terms of the "language of emotions" so that a "language user" becomes an individual who is minimally adept at understanding and reading emotions. But this would be stretching the Pragma-Dialectic model too far. Rather, we need to introduce a separate foundation.

The new foundation introduced will be that of emotionalizing. This assumption, at the very heart of the multi-modal approach to argumentation, takes emotions and other non-logical aspects seriously. It is important, before proceeding, to understand the significance of this.

One way to think of argumentation is as a careful investigation of dis-interested parties determined to uncover the truth or the best approximation thereof. Argument may also be considered the process of defending a standpoint. Argumentation is sometimes viewed as a means for solving problems, be they decisions (including what to believe,) conflicts, or interest-based issues. Or, argumentation can be viewed as a means for moving from disagreement to agreement. In any case at all, regardless of the chosen definition, the role of emotion is central. Even in the context of a critical discussion it is important to pay attention and be alert to emotional cues and

information. To do otherwise is simply to forget that one is arguing with a human being.

Emotionalizing involves two major activities. First, one pays attention to "emotional consistency." That is, is the discussant exhibiting emotional cues that are consistent with the verbally expressed logical assertions. Secondly, one looks for indications demonstrating the degree of commitment to the expressed standpoint. That is, the discussant may hold the standpoint in extremely varying degrees. The differences in degree can be significant when attempting to pursue solutions, get criticisms heard, or understand the grounds for holding a position.

There is no suggestion here that the two components, consistency and commitment, are the only uses or purposes of emotion in argumentation. There are others which include, for example, reaction checking. This occurs when one is, say, presenting an argument and one observes the reaction of the disputant to the argument. One may alter an argument, switch tacks, intensify an appeal, or underscore an argument's importance as a result of an observed emotional reaction. But while these, and other similar uses of emotional response are important, consistency and commitment are normative structural aspects of argumentation that is intended to result in a clear and mutually satisfactory agreement.

Consistency between what is spoken and what is shown is a crucial element in argumentation. Even in written argument tone and choice of language can indicate an emotional attachment to a standpoint that is out of sync with what one expects. I do not mean to suggest that there are not enormous differences between the role emotion plays in written and verbal argumentation. Rather, I simply want to point out that emotional information is not only communicated by ostensive behaviour and vocal cues, but also by choice of words, sentence construction, and other linguistic cues. Determining when a dispute partner's stated position is consistent with her observed emotional reactions can be a major indicator of how one is proceeding and how one ought to proceed in a particular argumentation. Emotional communication and verbal communication must both be noted and consistent for an effective agreement to be reached.

The degree of commitment one's opposer has to a standpoint or to the contra position of one's own standpoint is similarly essential information. An argument will be entirely different if one's opposer is vehemently in opposition or merely considering the alternatives. Often it is emotional information that is the most reliable indicator of commitment.

Consistency and commitment often work together insofar as an inconsistency between words and feelings will frequently indicate that the commitment being verbally expressed is not representative of the actual degree of commitment. But consistency also functions to indicate that a particular argumentation is being accepted when it is really not, or when an argumentation might be beside the point due to dark side considerations. But the crucial point is that multi-modal argumentation holds that emotionalizing is as crucial to the emotional mode, and to argument in general, as is dialectification to the logical mode. Without it one can have an argument, but one cannot have a rich communication that is likely to lead to a deep understanding of mutual positions and standpoints.

### *Expressive Speech Acts*

One of the most important considerations in the Pragma-Dialectic programme is the role of Searlean speech acts. Building on the usual speech act construction and typography van Eemeren and Grootendorst introduce the notion of the complex speech act to account for the series of individual speech acts that form a given

argumentation. In their discussions they identify four kinds of speech acts that occur in a dispute, and further identify in which stages of a dispute those speech acts can usefully occur. The four stages of an argumentation are 1] confrontation, 2] opening, 3] argumentation, 4] concluding, and each has speech acts that are appropriate to it.

It is important at this time to take a moment and very briefly describe the five sorts of speech acts there are, and where (if at all) they are deemed to occur in the various stages. The first sort are *assertives* and they may occur at any stage of an argumentation. Assertives are speech acts that create assertions, make statements, and otherwise introduce items that can be considered to be true or false. They are used to express standpoints and to present argumentation for and against standpoints. Clearly, they are at the heart of the logical mode of argumentative communication.

The second sort of speech act are the *directives*: these are used to ask questions, make requests, give directions, and so on. According to van Eemeren and Grootendorst they occur properly in the confrontation and argumentation stages. The third sort, *commissives*, are speech acts that perform (i.e., commit) an action. Promises are an obvious example, but in the argumentative realm acceptance and rejection and agreement and disagreement are more central. They can occur in virtually every stage.

All of the first three sorts of speech act are "good guys," and have appropriate uses within an argumentative context. But now we turn to the "bad guys" whose role is either non-existent or highly limited. These include *declaratives* and *expressives*.

Declaratives are largely institutional, and include such authority dependent performatives as, "I declare the games open!" or, "You are now husband and wife." The exception is "usage declaratives" which serve to define terms, as in "I mean by the term 'logical' what is often meant by 'rational.'" Because of this limited range of usage, declaratives, aside from usage declaratives are not deemed to play a significant role in argumentation. Nor am I inclined to disagree with this statement. The difficulty is not in the area of the role of declaratives, but rather the limited range thought to apply to usage declaratives.

If we stop to consider many marketplace arguments, it becomes clear that much of what goes on has to do with meanings *and how they are taken and intended*. That is, we frequently argue about what was said and how it was meant. Is it, then, a usage declarative if someone says, "No, that's not right, I meant that Larry is a nice person." Or, "Oh, no, I never said Larry was nasty." Or, "I don't care what you think you heard me say, what I meant was that Larry is nasty." Perhaps we need another class? Perhaps we need to include "message declaratives" in the list of speech acts. They are an important category because real-life arguments rarely fail to involve significant references to previous communications.

In the emotional mode such message declaratives often play an important role. Great emotional turmoil can be created by messages that are misunderstood or misinterpreted. There are even times when one uses a message declarative to negate (sometimes futilely) a message that was actually uttered. Therefore, these speech acts can play a role beyond one that is merely stipulative or designatory. They can lead and turn the argumentation in ways that might not have been anticipated. In every mode, and especially in the emotional mode, the clarification of messages is a vital component to argumentation. That is, when we argue we are often concerned with what was meant, what was said, and what was intended.

The last class of speech acts to be considered are the ones most frowned upon by the pragma-dialectic approach, the expressive speech acts. They state quite clearly (1984) that, "Rational discussions contain no

illocutionary acts belonging to the [class] of the expressives" (p. 106). And, (1992), expressive speech acts "have no place in a critical discussion" (p. 39). However, this draconian dismissal of an entire form of communication is ameliorated as follows.

Of course, this does not mean that [expressives] cannot affect the resolution process at all. A sigh of the antagonist that he is unhappy with the protagonist's arguments is an emotional comment that may distract attention from the arguments and from the fact that the protagonist actually observes all the commonly agreed discussion rules. On the other hand, expressives can also encourage or stimulate a meaningful exchange of ideas. (p. 39)

They also believe that expressives can really be indirect speech acts that can be reinterpreted as primary speech acts. That is, someone can bleat in anger, and that can easily be construed as, "I disagree with the statement just put forward."

There are two separate issues here. The first is, should emotion be considered to have a significant and appropriate role in a critical discussion. And, both parts of that question require detailed and separate consideration, much of which has taken place in Gilbert (1995, 1997). Without repeating my previous arguments, let me merely say that the very assumption that we can separate the logical content of an argument from the emotional is itself suspect. Certainly, we can *for the purposes of modelling*, distinguish between elements that are more or less emotional and those that are more or less logical, but supposing that this means it is possible to have an argument that does not contain emotion is ludicrous. Moreover, to then compound the error and decide, largely on prejudicial reasons, that the emotional content is somehow less reliable, more suspect, evil, less valuable, and not worthy of attention is to completely misunderstand what a real natural language argument is. And, it does no good to try and say, "Well, we are only concerned with 'critical discussions' or 'pure dialectics.'" This merely begs the entire question.

If we are going to attempt to model real argumentative practice, then we are obligated to approach it as it occurs. And marketplace argument always occurs with at least some emotional involvement. That involvement may be greater or less, central or peripheral, but it will, far more often than not, be there. We ignore it, not at our peril, but at the risk of creating a model that is almost as far from the realities of actual argumentative practice as is formal logic. This is not the place for pursuing this particular line, and I refer anyone interested to Gilbert (1994, 1995.)

The second issue is how one proceeds within an emotional framework to model and utilize emotional input. That is, if expressive speech acts are to be admitted into the realm of what we ought to model when modelling argumentation, we need to know how emotions may be correctly and incorrectly used. The final part of this discussion will focus on this issue.

### *Controlling Emotions*

The main concern of the group we might call 'neo-logicians' seems to have is an ancient one: viz., emotions, if legitimated, will lead to arguments that involve shouting, one-sidedness, blind devotion to standpoints, the encouragement of underhanded tactics, and nuclear war. None of this is true. Anyone who listened, in the 1970s to Vietnam war hawks who urged using nuclear weapons on Hanoi knows that most of their arguments were exceedingly logical. Indeed, one often felt that it was precisely a modicum of emotion, usually called "human

feeling," that was absent in their considerations. But this is not to say that emotional argumentation does not need rules and limits. I.e., emotional argumentation is just like any other form of argumentation and needs both descriptive and prescriptive investigation.

The foundation, prior to the discussion of rules, is the establishment of a principle essential to the role of emotion in argumentation. This principle builds upon the discussions above concerning the role of emotional communication. It must be noted that this is not a simple principle of emotion, but rather a principle concerning *the role of emotion in argumentation*. This the Principle of Pragmatic Emotionalization, and it is designed to describe what is, in fact, relied upon by most ordinary language communicators, (Using "language" in its very broadest sense.)

*The Principle of Pragmatic Emotionalization [PPE]:*

Given that a communicator is presenting an emotional message that is inconsistent with the logical message, then the recipient may assume that the logical message may not be reliable, and/or the complete message may be compound, and/or the goals of the communicator may have been misidentified, and/or the communicator's position may not have been fully exposed.

The inconsistency may be a function of a disproportion between words and the means of expression, or between the meaning of the words and emotional sense accompanying them. (I.e., it need not always be a question of proportion.)

Possibility [a] means that the communicator may be uttering words that are not sincere either to disguise an emotion or because there are emotional elements of which she is not yet aware, i.e., they are dark-side emotions. [b] means that, while the words may be sincere, there may be more to the message than they indicate. The third condition, [c] may occur when one concludes that a communicator has a goal set, but, in reality the set or members of the set have been misidentified. The final possibility, which will almost always be involved to a greater or lesser degree, is [d], wherein the full position of the communicator has not been adequately exposed.

There may seem to be a loose connection between this rule and certain Gricean ideas, most notably the notion of "conversational implicature." This is no accident. Conversational implicature also depends, at its base, on the notion of consistency. The big difference, and an unfortunate one at that, is that the Gricean scheme gives one much more direction upon encountering said inconsistency. In the emotional mode, while one should certainly take note of it, it is not always clear how to proceed. In particular, in many situations both from a practical and cultural point of view, one is virtually forced to ignore the inconsistency in any overt way. However, that merely means that one cannot *always* point it out. It does not mean that it does not become grist for the argumentation in process.

Certainly, emotional argumentation, if it is to be conducted with an end to reaching understanding and agreement must limit itself by rules of sincerity and fair expression. Being emotional does not mean being out of control. Screaming and shouting have no more legitimacy in the emotional mode than in the logical, (which is not to say they have none at all in either). Similarly, emotional information is most useful when it is more rather than less direct. If A feels that B's arguments are intended more to "get at him," rather than address the issues logically, that will only become really useful if A informs B that that is what he thinks she is doing.

This talk is described as a "prolegomenon," and insofar as that is the aim, it is completed. The PPE can serve as a foundation to construct rules and guidelines in order to critique and hone the appropriate use of emotion in

argumentation. What remains is, obviously, nothing short of vast: the rules must be constructed and considered. At their base they will have the same motivation as the Pragma-Dialectic rules for critical discussion—the continuation of an argument to an effective and agreeable end. The difference, of course, being that when dealing in a multi-modal context truth takes on a less positivistic air than neo-logicians may care for. But if the models we work with are going to even attempt to come near being suitable for real marketplace or, better yet, kitchen argumentation, then they must operate within a pragmatic metaphysics.

### ***Notes***

1. I use 'logical' here in the sense of Gilbert, 1994, "Multi-Modal Argumentation." In this sense the term 'rational' or 'reasoned' is applicable to a broader range of modes, while 'logical' serves to indicate the precise linear thinking indicative of the critical-rational approach. 

2. It's interesting that the expression 'native speaker' carries more with it than someone who merely knows the language. In fact, if we think about it, the difference between a native and non-native speaker is often the ability to add the impact of emotions and other non-logical modalities into the communicative mix. 

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