

CHAPTER 12.

MULTI-MODAL 2010: MULTI-MODAL ARGUMENTATION 20 YEARS LATER

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Abstract: My essay, “Multi-Modal Argumentation” was published in the journal, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, in 1994 (Gilbert 1994). This information appeared again in my book, *Coalescent Argumentation* in 1997 (Gilbert 1997). In the ensuing 16 years, there have been many changes in Argumentation Theory, and I would like to take this opportunity to examine my now teen-aged theory in light of the developments in our discipline. I will begin by reminding you of the essential aspects of my theory, make some general comments, and then review the several modes individually.

The theory of multi-modal argumentation holds that communication in general, and argumentation specifically, never occurs in one single mode. By a ‘mode’ I mean, fuzzily, a means or way of communicating, a form of expression, or a style of imparting information. Modes, then, are systems of messaging using culturally dependent signs, signals and methods intended to pass information from one subject to another. I never suggested that messages were exclusively in one mode or another, but rather that they were all mixed and could only be examined separately

for the purposes of argumentative investigation. Moreover, I never argued for the correctness of the four modes I chose, and allowed that other models might select three or five or other numbers of modes.

The four modes I did identify were the Logical, the Emotional, the Visceral, and the Kisceral. The logical mode appears in virtually every argument in one way or another. It is the mode that assists us in moving from a message to a conclusion in a reasoned and patterned way. Some arguments are more logically derived than others, especially those that Perelman has called quasi-logical. Moreover, premises within a logical argument will not, ipso facto, be themselves highly logical. The second mode is the emotional mode, and here I have written that the key is that the emotions being expressed in or by an argument are more important than the words being used for that expression. Thus we often disregard the words someone utters because we are confident that the message is expressed in the emotional package in which the words are located.

The third mode is the visceral, and covers all aspects of a message or an argument that are physical or environmental. Here the idea of environment is being used widely to include political and social aspects of a context such as power relations, physical configurations, and such like. Visceral events can themselves be premises in an argument and I have used a double square bracket to indicate them. E.g., [[Robert touches Marcia's hand]]. This is important because an action can change the significance of the words in a message, and, therefore, is part of the message. The final mode I identified involved the area of communication that is intuitive, mystical, religious, or revelatory. I call this mode the kisceral deriving from the Japanese word 'ki' meaning energy. This is a mode that is often disdained by rationalists, though they have difficulties dismissing it due to its widespread use (Gilbert 2010). It's fairly clear, for example, that more of the human population believes in the existence of invisible entities than does not,

and even scholars who are otherwise highly rationalistic believe in various sorts of deities.

My reasons for introducing the complication of multi-modalities into Argumentation Theory has to do with my respect for its importance. I believe that Argumentation Theory is a vital discipline that can be used to understand and hone the tools people draw on to communicate with each other, embrace agreement and avoid violence. In order to do this it seems to me that we need to examine those sorts of arguments that ordinary arguers actually use. We cannot simply look at those argument forms we believe arguers ought to use, but rather those which they do use. It is this belief that leads me to make so much trouble about the forms of argument we study and to insist that we must go to the arguer rather than have the arguer come to us. The issue, as I saw it, was that Argumentation Theory was focusing on the easy parts, the CRCs that were analyzable and that could be broken into easily digested bits and be categorized and sorted without too much dissension. Yet our own lived experience of arguing with colleagues, friends and family, demonstrates that arguing is not a linear process with clearly defined edges and readily identifiable components. Our lived experience entails, if anything, the exact opposite conclusion: real, everyday, marketplace argumentation is frequently chaotic, rambling, emotional, and rife with explicit and implicit references to, and reliance on, the context, social milieu, personalities, and personal history of the argument and the arguers.

This is the point made by Willard in 1989, based on his work going back to the 1970s (Willard 1989). He claimed that arguers use all tools at their disposal to persuade a dispute partner, and also that all communications taking place in an argument are part of it. In my work, I took these ideas to the extreme, and included as parts of an argument the physical setting, mannerisms used, and a multitude of other factors not normally included in the analysis of an argument. I hope that now the purpose

and importance of a multi-modal approach becomes clearer: In order to investigate the role that all these aspects and factors play in a complex communication it is necessary to examine them using more than the tools logic and even informal logic makes available. We need to analyze them according to their purpose, intended and actual, and their results, intended and actual. This demands a very wide breadth. That is where the multi-modal approach comes in. A multi-modal analysis allows us to examine a situation from a variety of perspectives with each one adding more information and insights.

The tools, multi-modal aside, that currently exist are very valuable and very important. The ability to diagram an argument, investigate it for fallacies, apply a Pragma-Dialectic analysis, are all vital tools for the argumentation analyst. Nonetheless, my sense that the richness of communication was being missed by not applying these tools within the various modes, by not applying them in a finer way, led me to believe that a great deal of importance was lost to the analyst. By using these tools within the individual modes, and by tailoring them to the use and value of the individual modes a great deal more can be captured.

I want to emphasize several points that, while mentioned in my work, should be stressed. The first involves the difficulty of separating the modes, and, more importantly, placing communications in modes. By this I mean to refer to the process of determining that some communication, action, message, or argument, occurs in, say, the visceral mode rather than the emotional mode. The fact is, that while there are paradigms of each mode, separability, and its analogue categorizability, are never definite. Consider, for example, a grimace. A grimace can be used to demonstrate disapproval, pain, discomfort, or other emotions. In itself, it is a visceral action, a physical movement of the lips and

face. In context it might indicate something emotional, as when one grimaces at the thought of going to the dentist or taking an exam. We cannot know, and need not know, if a grimace is primarily a visceral or emotional object, except when we are actually analyzing the role one particular grimace-token plays in a particular argumentative interaction.

In this regard, it might have been better to have referred to the modes as “aspects” as this might have emphasized the ability of an occurrence to play many roles, and to be viewed in different ways. The modes do not indicate real different things, but rather ways of analyzing or dissecting things according to certain interesting conceptions. A grimace, as it occurs in an encounter, simply is what it is. The phenomenological experience of a grimace provides us with cues that can be played out in different ways depending largely on the balance of the context. We know from Wittgenstein and Grice, to name but two philosophers, that we cannot determine meaning outside of context. The phrase, “That’s just great!” can indicate joy or bedevilment, just like, ¡Perfecto, es todo necesitamos ahora!” Interestingly, an English speaker might well understand the import of the Spanish declaration simply by virtue of the context, grimace, and tone. The modes, rather than being tools for categorizing, are tools for understanding the meanings of a communication.

Whenever we do philosophy, communication theory or any sort of abstract analysis, we necessarily take things apart, break them up into bite-size analyzable bits. It is imperative, however, that we not mistake the analysis, the model for the reality. We need to look at the reality as if it were made up of bits and pieces, but we must not forget that it is a heuristic and that the reality is itself dense and complete. If, to use an analogy, we mix several colours together in a glass bowl, we end up with a new colour. We know what colours we put in, but the result is still one colour, and it is not possible to subsequently separate them out. The modes are like the colours: we know that they are all in there, and

we can discuss their impact on the whole, but in doing so we are using constructs and not reality. It is this that I would emphasize more and, perhaps, the term 'aspects' would add to that emphasis.

I would like to turn now to the various modes and discuss them in light of the further work I have done, and some of the comments that have been made. Of course, the pre-eminent mode, the grandmother, la abuela, is the logical mode. In fact, some rationalists believe that all communication is really logical communication in other guises. That is not to say that every communication is straightforwardly logical, but rather that the way in which we make sense of it is logical. So we translate, if you will, in lightning speed so that it just seems that the reasoning is non-logical when in reality it is very logical. Fricker (1995, 183) responds to this sort of approach when she is talking about intuition. Can we really imagine, she asks, that the many things we do automatically or quickly like hitting a tennis ball or recognizing a face are really long drawn out processes done quickly? That hardly makes sense. Damasio (1994, 171) calls this the High Reason view and argues that it simply can't work: the available alternatives when we make choices are overwhelmingly vast, and it would take forever to sort through them no matter how quickly we did it.

I do not want to spend a great deal of time here simply arguing that the non-logical modes exist. I concede that we can just about always create a story about a non-logical communication that provides it a logical gloss, but I do not see what that proves. We can give a mechanistic interpretation of, say, love and the sacrifices one makes for it, but such explanations are inevitably unsatisfactory. They fail to explain why some people fall in love and others do not. They fail to explain altruism, why Jane might love

Jack but not his twin brother Alan, and other lovely anomalies. Moreover, there is a difference between the cause of something and the experience of it. Knowing that when I burn my hand I am just exciting a bunch of nerves to an extremely high level of activity, does not make the pain any less.

I was very careful, back when I first introduced the idea of modes, to choose the term 'logical' rather than the term 'rational.' This was done to emphasize that there is nothing irrational about the non-logical modes, but rather, as I put it then, logic is imperialistic and likes to seem in charge of everything, but that's just highlighting, if you will, its aggressive underpinnings. So, in my world, saying of a communication that it is not logical is not to denigrate it, but, rather, to point out that different tools need to be used. Among the tools I have examined most closely are those pertaining to the emotional mode.

There is a good case for saying that (virtually) every argument contains at least a minimal emotional component for the simple reason that one is moved from inertia to make an argument. The stimulus that moves one from inertia is some degree of emotional reaction, some sense of disagreement, some feeling that something is wrong and that one cares enough to act. This does not mean that every argument is, at heart, an emotional argument. Rather, it means that emotion and whatever logical sense goes into an argument are inseparable. Even though the communication might be quite logical, an emotional argument may still be present provided the emotions expressed in the argument are more important than the words and signals used to express them (Gilbert 1995, 8). In other words, the message is in the emotions and not in the discursive component. A simple example is when, as above, the grimace contradicts the statement. Someone

grimacing and saying they are not in pain will not be believed whereas someone smiling and not exhibiting stress will be.

All this I take to be non-controversial, and I believe that anyone involved in any form of communication studies, let alone Argumentation Theory, would not demur from such an inane conclusion. What is puzzling is that given this obviousness so little attention has been paid to arguments involving these forms by the major theories. I have provided specific maps for investigating emotional arguments in both the Informal Logic approach and the Pragma-Dialectic theory, (Gilbert 2004, 2005) but neither has moved to embrace these views and attempt to incorporate emotion into argument analysis. Moreover, these major theories have not embraced any alternative way of including the analysis of emotion in argument. I believe this demonstrates, more than anything else, that there still exists a strong prejudice within Argumentation Theory against emotion as an argument forming apparatus (Vide Godden 2003).

There have been, to be clear, a number of scholars who have been examining the relationship between emotion and argument. These include, aside from myself, Walton, Ben-Ze'ev, Plantin, Tindale, Burlison, Palnalp, Wohlrapp and Carozza (Ben-Ze'ev 1995; Burlison and Planalp 2000; Plantin 1999; Walton 1992; Wohlrapp 2006; Carozza 2007). Nonetheless, emotion is still an aside, as opposed to a factor that must be considered in all circumstances. One reason for this is the mistaken belief that discursive communication is considerably more precise and manageable than emotional communication. I have argued against this (Gilbert 2002) but the prejudice is deeply rooted even though the truth is that we trust emotional communications more than their linguistic components. Everyone who is married knows that when the spouse says, "Do whatever you want; I don't care," it is the emotion and not the words that contain the real message.

There is a reason for the avoidance of emotional messages that goes to the heart of the issue: the fear of psychologism. As I use the term here, I refer to the ascription to a subject of a position, belief or attitude based on non-discursive information communicated by the emotion present in a message. Such an ascription is a direct violation of the Pragma-Dialectic rule III: Rule III: “An attack on a standpoint must relate to the standpoint that has really been advanced by the protagonist” (Eemeren and Grootendorst 1987, 286). So, assuming that an interlocutor has expressed an emotional statement that she has not explicitly uttered, it may violate this rule. On the other hand, the very next rule, IV, states: “A person can be held to the premisses he leaves implicit” (op cit 287). It is possible that one could play with this tension provided one can determine safe rules for identifying those situations when an emotional message can be considered implicit. I have attempted such an analysis (Gilbert 2002), but it has yet to be embraced within Pragma-Dialectics.

Informal Logic similarly has a prejudice against the unexpressed except insofar as it might be seen to apply to virtually deductively entailed enthymematic consequences. Here the penalty is most likely a charge of Hasty Conclusion or possibly Ignoratio Elenchi. In any case, Informal Logic has a decided antipathy toward including emotional message components as integrated parts of argument. This is not to say that emotional components are ruled out of court, but rather that they must be expressed quite explicitly in ways that emotions are rarely presented. This is clearly demonstrated when arguments are diagrammed: there is simply no place to put the emotional interpretation of a message that may, in fact, straightforwardly contradict its discursive statement. In fact, the ideal communication for Informal Logic is one that Barbara O’Keefe (1988) describes as utilizing the Expressive Method Design Logic, the least flexible of the three she describes. In short, even though I have been spending most of my energy on the question of the

role of emotion in argumentation, there is still a lot of headway that needs to be made.

The visceral mode covers a wide range of communicative factors that, like emotion, are often considered peripheral or irrelevant. Certainly the visceral mode includes what is generally considered non-verbal communication, but also further areas that go beyond that category. To begin with, I would place some non-verbal communications in the emotional category rather than the visceral because their emotional content simply outweighs their physicality. That is, the fact of the action or message's being attached or connected to the body or context is not as important as the emotional content it carries. This is analogous to discursive versus emotional content: where when the latter outweighs the former, the message is considered emotional. Secondly, there are visceral aspects of a communication which I believe to be very important that would only be considered non-verbal communication at a stretch. These include power relations, argument style, social and cultural considerations such as class and gender, as well as other factors that influence an argument or can be used in an argument that would not traditionally be considered non-verbal communication.

The standard approaches place a huge emphasis on the discursive, often to the point where if something is not discursive it is, for all practical purposes, ruled out of court. How, I wonder, can one remove the physical setting of an argument from the process of the argument? How can we ignore the role, for example, of uniforms? Of a judge's robes? Or even the male professor's ubiquitous tweed jacket? Oh, the traditionalist answers, but it is a fallacy to take those things into account when evaluating an argument. But it is impossible not to take them into account when having an argument (Gilbert 2002). To mention but one

area in which such visceral considerations play an important role, consider gender in this argument. Edeslky and Tannen (1993), for example, show that men take more speaking turns than women in mixed gender meetings, and go so far as to suggest that the traditional yucky female is likely one who talks as much as a man. Gender makes an enormous difference in the process of an argument no matter how much we think it ought not (Gilbert 1994), and I cannot shake the feeling that it is important that we pay attention to what is before we focus only on what ought be.

Authority and categorization, whether by race, gender, culture, or any other means play an overwhelming role in the process of argumentation and we ignore it at our peril. The dearth of women in philosophy, for example, is laid by some (Rooney 2010) at the feet of the style of argumentation used in philosophy, and especially its reliance on the argument-as-war metaphor. What does it mean, then, to state that such factors are irrelevant to the analysis of an argument? It means that we are removing the argument from its context, examining it *en abstracto*, as a CRC, a claim-reason-complex, something that exists independent of its users, its hearers, its senders, or persons, and, I believe, there is no such thing. Having said that, let me give an appreciation to every model that is a tool in the Argumentation Theorist's toolbox. There is nothing wrong with taking a piece of an argument and using it to demonstrate the kind of connectivity that occurs in argumentation, or to show that different parts of an argument support each other in identifiable ways. Whether the process is one involving formal logic, informal logic, an argument map, or a Pragma-Dialectic speech act analysis, it is very valuable – so long as the analysis is not confused with the argument.

What I am doing by including the visceral mode as a form that must be investigated is making room for all the factors mentioned above as well as many others to be examined. Once we understand a mode, how it works, what its dynamics are, how it

can be used both properly and improperly, then we might be able to create some valuable normative correlates that will be useful. And this is why Argumentation Theory must be a discipline in its own right, rather than an area cobbled together from bits and pieces of other, more established areas. A ship builder will employ carpenters, electricians, all sorts of engineers, glaziers, and so on, but it is the art of creating a ship that must hold it all together so that the finished project is functional, beautiful, practical and buildable.

Recently I have been thinking about the role of kisceral arguments (Gilbert 2010). The kisceral mode includes argument forms and data that are involved with intuition, the mystical, hunches, the religious, mysterious, and generally, non-sensory knowledge and forms of persuasion. As I regularly point out, more of the human population believes in the existence of invisible being such as gods, ghosts, spirits and so on than does not. Moreover, many of these people believe they have communion with such entities and/or insight into their nature and being. As puzzling as I find this, it is nonetheless the case, and even many highly educated persons maintain such beliefs. One need only look at the scholarly journals that abound in theology and religious studies to see the truth of this. The difficulty with the kisceral mode is two fold. The first issue reflects the strong sense of certainty, of surety, that many people have concerning some non-sensory belief, while the second centres on the inability of such beliefs to be subject to falsification. These two problems are closely related and intertwined.

Surety is at the core of intuition insofar as it puts these beliefs and arguments apart from other, more empirical beliefs. In fact, we often feel more strongly and believe more fervently in a select number of our non-sensory beliefs than we do in our collection

of facts. I believe with a great deal of certainty, for example, that if one were to write out an integer with as many places as hairs on the head of this audience, there would still be one higher. I can't prove this, yet I believe it with certainty. This is truly bizarre: here I am a highly rational person holding firmly to an unfalsifiable belief that claims that there exists an infinity of invisible objects. It gets worse. Not only do I hold such beliefs, but I also hold that many others who hold different falsifiable beliefs with just as much evidence as I have, and believe them just as fervently as I believe my beliefs, are wrong.

My friend Kathy believes that everything that happens to you happens because you want it to happen. You may not know that you want it to happen, but you must because otherwise it wouldn't happen. This includes everything from winning the lottery to having cancer. The analyticity and circularity of her position does not faze her in the least, anymore than the definitional quality of there being no highest integer perturbs me. Yet it strikes me that she is wrong and is not justified in holding her belief while I do have such justification. Here we might say: my belief is fact, yours is theory, and hers is mysticism. This translates somewhat less amusingly to, *Mi opinión refleja los hechos, la tuya es mera teoría, la de ella es un caso de misticismo*. In other words, I know what I am talking about but she doesn't. Nonetheless, both beliefs are unfalsifiable and both are held with a great deal of certainty, perhaps hers more than mine, but mine is pretty solid as well.

When philosophers talk about kisceral arguments they typically worry about such things as axioms and foundational normative principles (DePaul and Ramsey 1997). One ultimate difficulty for those who would like to dismiss intuitional arguments, is that the grounds for doing so typically rely on intuition (Sosa 2006). One way of thinking about kisceral arguments is to consider the Discovery/Justification distinction. We tell our introductory students that the process of discovery is different

than the presentation of justification. Yet in many kisceral arguments this is not the case; in those cases the experience of discovery is the same as the justification. The mystic whose acolyte proceeds along certain specified steps may be following the only form of justification available, just as the Intuitionist mathematicians saw the process of proof creation, the actual construction of a mathematical object, as essential to its justification. Are there facts we cannot comprehend if we do not have certain experiences? Can a male never understand a mother's love because he has never experienced pregnancy? Am I an atheist because I have never had a revelation or a mystical experience? In most cases I reject these ideas for what I consider are good reasons. I believe, for example, that there is likely no major difference between the love of an adoptive mother compared to a biological one, and once exceptions begin to accrue, it's only a matter of time before they become overwhelming.

The problem is that my belief, even if supported by evidence from social psychology, ultimately rests on an intuition as well. This means that the role of Argumentation Theory is to find the means for separating and evaluating different beliefs according to criteria that can be accepted by the partners, and agreed upon as legitimate grounds for distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable beliefs. This, of course, has both object level and meta level applications. The object level may have identifiable rules and procedures as Western philosophy does with logic and its less formal siblings, or if not carefully laid there are likely precedents and traditions. On the meta level matters are more complex because it is there that we will find differences in basic means of establishing beliefs and truths. A Papal edict, for example, does not carry weight with a non-Catholic, while for a member of the faith it is a sign of absolute truth. In these cases kisceral arguments carry great weight, and the question of whether or not we can separate those we like and those we do not becomes much more tenuous. Still, the job is there to be done.

It will have been noticed in my presentation that I have not distinguished between arguments as objects and arguments as processes, or, to use D. O'Keefe's (1977) language, argument1 and argument2. I have avoided this distinction because, on the one hand, the multi-modal framework cuts across them, and on the other, the distinction itself is not terribly useful aside from providing some paradigmatic exemplars. The real problem with the argument1 and argument2 distinction lies in the complexity and necessity of context in understanding arguments. The identification and isolation of a typical argument1 requires that we understand enough of the context to be able to remove it and inspect it, and yet, unless we are examining something created for a Critical Thinking class, it is impossible to understand it in isolation from that context. Moreover, if we allow that anything that influences an argument is part of it, then the context is part of it and, thereby, an argument2. We end up with a sort of Heisenberg Principle of Argumentation: to remove a part of an argument from its context is to thereby, ipso facto, change it. This is not to say that we cannot study something in isolation, but rather that when we do so we are missing a great deal of important information.

I believe it is obvious that the notion of context is important, and many authors and theories pay lip service to this. Examples are often preceded by short paragraphs that describe the general background, for example, of a letter to the editor. But this is nothing. Compare this to the analysis that might accompany the discovery of an anthropological relic where the surrounding area, adjacent soil, general location, historical knowledge of the area, flora and fauna will all be examined to learn more about the object. Context can demonstrate a great deal as when we examine a political situation and the arguments presented for it.

Duran's 2006 analysis of the Chilean press (Duran 2006), takes enormous amounts of local, social and historical information into account. Moreover, a rich account naturally examines the several modes as a means to understanding an object and its processes. If our archeological find was a tool, was it decorated? Did it appear cared for? Important to its owner? Part of a set? These are emotional questions. Was it made from local materials? What tools were used to make this one? These are visceral questions. Did it have a spiritual aspect? Were there designs appealing to gods or demons? These are kisceral aspects. Just as with other endeavours, understanding arguments requires a knowledge of the context, and the ways in which the message was communicated, intended and used. This, in turn, can be ably assisted by a multi-modal analysis.

I have, in the preceding, tried to present both an amplification and defence of multi-modal argumentation. I believe, as do some others, that it can be a useful and powerful tool for investigating the structure, meaning, and reliability of arguments. We must never forget, in examining the models that make theorizing possible, that the models are but mere shadows of the reality.

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