

ISSA Proceedings 2010 - Bi-Logical Analysis Of Arguments In Political Propaganda: The Case Of The Chilean Press 1970-1973



This paper is an attempt to bring together ideas discussed in several papers that I have read in conferences of the International Society for Studies in Argumentation and the Ontario Society for Studies in Argumentation (Durán 2007, 2008 and 2010). Its main thrust is the view that the study of argumentation should include the analysis of emotional, physical and intuitive arguments as well as logical ones. However, this paper concentrates on the contribution that the psychoanalytic theory of Bi-Logic has to offer for the study of argumentation.

I begin this paper by summarizing the main aspects of my research on the propaganda of agitation developed by the Chilean daily newspaper *El Mercurio* of Santiago against the government of Salvador Allende (1970-1973). A fully developed account of this study appears in my 1995 book (Durán 1995), and a summary of it was published in the *Proceedings of the Sixth Conference of the International Society for the Study of Argumentation* (Durán 2007). In essence, *El Mercurio* represented the interests of powerful enemies of Allende that felt threatened by his government, from the Chilean upper classes to the United States' government and some influential multi-national corporations. The purpose of the propaganda of *El Mercurio* was to undermine the Allende government by instilling fear and hatred in the middle classes and the military so that a coup d'état could be staged. This happened on September 11, 1973 followed by a military dictatorship of 16 years led by General Augusto Pinochet.

The concept of propaganda of agitation is taken from the French author Jacques Ellul (1973) who defines it as an opposition and subversive propaganda destined to undermine a government, even to overthrow it. Furthermore, according to Ellul, this form of propaganda operates within a crisis, or it tends to provoke it. Fear and hatred are generally two of its emotional objectives and springs. In

contrast to propaganda of agitation, Ellul says, there is propaganda of integration, which is propaganda of conformity with a given social system. This latter form of propaganda tries to stabilize, unify and reinforce the social system. Finally, Ellul says that these forms of propaganda usually work together, in different combinations.

Two of the main themes of El Mercurio's propaganda were at that time, "Need for Order" and "Marxist Violence". Both were quantitatively and qualitatively very significant, and intended to portray what El Mercurio perceived as the fundamental clash in Allende's Chile. The following image illustrates the clash. In the picture, a violent Marxist appears attacking a police officer, who represents traditional order, according to El Mercurio.



Fig. 2

However, another important theme in this propaganda was “Anguishing Portrait of the World”. This was an unusual theme for El Mercurio, a paper that represents a rather liberal rational tradition in Chile. The theme intended to relate items about crimes, accidents, natural catastrophes, fires and other non-political anguishing stories to Marxist Violence, as if both kinds of items were of the same nature, and indeed identical. Thus, a news-story about a murder, for example, could be closely related to a Marxist vicious attack. This issue is illustrated in the following image (Fig. 2) .

This page juxtaposes two completely different events that took place in subsequent nights, as if both represented the state of Chile in terms of criminal and/or Marxist violence.. The main headline reads “Horrible murder of a young girl”; there is a picture of the place where she was found (actually she was murdered and raped) in the Spanish Country Club in Santiago; and another picture of the same story shows the brother of the girl talking to journalists from El Mercurio. The other set of stories refers to violence incurred by a Marxist assault of High School for Girls No. 12.

For several months, coverage of crime became very high in El Mercurio. The next illustration shows how the newspaper attempted to describe a criminal gang as very dangerous and bloody. (Fig. 3)

The headline reads, “Two bloody assaults by the ‘Black Jackets’ in the Capital”. This gang appeared all of a sudden as a Congress election campaign started in Chile. El Mercurio presented it as a high-level criminal organization, equivalent to similar gangster organizations in the United States. The ‘Black Jackets’ was identified metaphorically with an extreme left Marxist movement on the basis of the black color of the uniforms of its members.



Fig. 3

However, the most gruesome and remarkable case of propaganda of agitation by El Mercurio was the coverage of the “Quartered Man” of Quilicura. The story appeared two weeks before the Congress election, and was covered with great intensity until then. The next page of El Mercurio illustrates this case (Fig. 4).

The headline here reads, “The body of the man found in Quilicura was quartered alive”. Quilicura is a small town in the outskirts of Santiago.

During the two weeks of coverage of the “Quartered Man” before the election, packages with human flesh were found in plastic bags in successive days. The case gave rise, as well, to news-stories about cannibalism that clearly echoed the cannibalism practiced by a group of young rugby players from Uruguay in the last two months of 1972. Their plane had crashed in the Andes, and they survived eating human flesh (Fig. 5).



Fig. 4

The next page of El Mercurio appeared the day before the election. It represents an outstanding case of juxtaposition of disturbing items. The main headline reads, "Armed Forces Take Control". It is juxtaposed to the following news-items: El Mercurio equivocally identified Allende as saying that the government intends to advance towards dictatorship of the proletariat; the ambassador of the United States is assassinated (in Sudan); the wife of the Quartered Man is found strangled; and there is a very low-key picture about the election the next day. Now, the headline about the Armed Forces is misleading because, according to the Chilean Constitution, the Armed Forces in times of election assumed control of Public Order: the headline is clearly suggesting that the Armed Forces should take Control of the Country! (Fig.6)

Finally, the day of the election, the coalition of all the opposition parties to Allende published, as a coalition, only one political ad. The ad relates one of the cases of cannibalism covered in the past two weeks, and generally the "Quartered Man" story, explicitly to the situation of Chile in those days.

In the second part of the paper, I introduce Michael Gilbert's theory of Multi-Modal Argumentation. In doing so, I try to show that the propaganda of agitation discussed in part one, can be described in a comprehensive and thorough way in terms of this theory. Michael Gilbert attempts an 'opening' of the traditional view that has conceived argumentation as based, essentially, on the logical mode. His theory proposes that we enlarge and extend the range of meaningful intellectual, academic and argumentation activities to include: Emotions, which had been

traditionally excluded, at least from Plato onwards. Physicality, that is, the domain of the body, which includes visual aspects. Moreover, the kisceral, which relates to intuition, the spiritual, the religious, the uncanny, etc.



Fig. 5

Gilbert (Gilbert, 1997, p. 75) introduces his theory in the following passage: “It has been argued in previous chapters that the traditional and dominant mode of arguing, the C-L, Critical-Logical mode, is restrictively narrow. When this mode is seen as the only legitimate form of rational argumentation, then there are profound and unreasonable limitations on actual argumentation as performed by real actors, and the limitation of methods favored by one group over another. These limitations provide both descriptive and normative reasons for rejecting the C-L mode as the sole legitimate form of argumentation. In this chapter, three new modes of argumentation, raising the number to four, are introduced. In addition to the classical logical mode (usually and egregiously identified with the “rational”), there are the emotional, visceral (physical), and kisceral (intuitive) modes.”

It is important to stress that this is not a way of reversing things, such that the logical mode would be excluded, but now, this mode can be assessed in the full flow of argumentation: it is possible thus to recognize the fundamental and substantive roles played by all the modes.

Applying now Gilbert’s theory to the analysis of El Mercurio’s propaganda, it is convenient to go one mode at a time. Thus, from the point of view of the logical

some individual items, be they headlines or pictures.

Finally, considering the kisceral mode, I believe it is also present in the propaganda. The attempt has been to induce a profound connection between crimes, accidents, and natural catastrophes, etc., on the one hand; but also, on the other hand, the connection between them and Marxist violence.

There is, however, another interesting aspect in dealing with the logical mode. The study that I presented in part one of this paper, concentrated on propaganda of agitation. Nevertheless, the study as a whole focused, as well, on some relevant aspects of propaganda of integration. In this sense, it is important to show one specific and significant valid logical argument found in the study.

(2) The Marxists always try to destroy democracy

Allende and his people are Marxists

Therefore, Allende and his people are trying to destroy democracy

Furthermore, if Allende and his people are destroying democracy, then they should be stopped with military violence. There is a good deal of historical sense in this argument, so besides its validity, the argument could be considered sound as well.

Given the comprehensive view that is possible to gain with the application of Multi-Modal Argumentation to the study of El Mercurio's propaganda, a further issue becomes clear. The four modes work in integration in the propaganda; they relate to each other in a way that makes the propaganda much stronger. They subtly reinforce each other. For example, the valid, and plausibly sound argument mentioned above, can provide logical credibility to the emotional, visual and kisceral argumentation. The layout of the pages and their structure contribute to make the propaganda more credible. However, the fundamental issue is to reinforce the production of fear and hatred so that the middle classes and the military can be prepared to undertake military action against Allende. For that purpose, the propaganda has provided logical grounds as well. I believe it is pertinent to say, that any individual opposing Allende would experience great anxiety, and that she or he would be able to produce invalid and valid logical arguments, and these latter arguments would provide a sense of credibility to their mere emotional reactions. This key issue will be examined in more detail below.

So far, I have tried to show that the propaganda of agitation by El Mercurio against the government of Allende in Chile entails a combination of all four modes of Michael Gilbert's theory of Multi-Modal Argumentation, and that the predominant one is the emotional mode. In the next part of the paper, I attempt to develop a Bi-Logical interpretation of El Mercurio's propaganda with especial focus on emotional arguments.

Bi-Logic is a psychoanalytic theory introduced by the psychoanalyst Ignacio Matte-Blanco with the publication of his main book *The Unconscious as Infinite Sets. An Essay in Bi-Logic* (Matte-Blanco, 1975). The essential issue in this theory is the assumption that there are two different logics operating in the mind. In order to understand Bi-Logic, it is necessary to be aware of set theory and the concept of relation, and specifically one of the properties of relations, called symmetrical/asymmetrical. A relation is called symmetrical when the relation can be reversed and asymmetrical when it cannot. Thus, $a=b$ is a symmetrical relation for the relation is maintained if we reverse it and say $b=a$; whereas a relation is called asymmetrical if it cannot be reversed, such as in the case of $a>b$. In essence, Matte-Blanco believes that, based on those two issues, it is possible to systematize Freud's proto-logical ideas on the unconscious. For, according to Matte-Blanco, in the unconscious there is no respect for asymmetrical relations and then all relations tend to be treated as symmetrical. In this sense, he says that the unconscious is regulated by what he calls the Principle of Symmetry (PS).

In his attempt to reformulate the Freudian unconscious, Matte-Blanco deduces a set of consequences that derive from the PS.

1) If the PS is applied then the part becomes identical to the whole. The reason for this identification is that if 'p' is part of the whole 'W', then applying the PS, 'W' is part of 'p'. This takes us to identify part 'p' and whole 'W'. Moreover, the same would happen to each part of this whole with the consequence that all the parts of a whole are identical to the whole and to each other.

2) If the PS is applied then the members of a set are identical to the set and to each other. Similarly to the above explanation, if 'm' is a member of the set 'S', then applying the PS, 'S' is a member of 'm'. The same would happen to each member of the set and thus, they would be identical to each other and the set. The same can be said of subsets as related to sets.

3) If the PS is applied then there are no negations. For if the set of affirmative propositions is a subset of the set of propositions, and then applying the PS, the

set of propositions is a subset of the set of affirmative propositions. The same would apply to the subset of negative propositions with the consequence that this set would be identical to the set of affirmative propositions.

4) If the PS is applied then there are no contradictions. The reason relates closely to the previous consequence of the application of the PS: since the affirmative and negative propositions are identical to each other, there cannot be contradictions.

Now, if we take seriously the (possible) existence of a PS and its consequences as described above, then certainly, we would be in the realm of another 'logic'. Consider the following argument: The body is contained within the heart because it is clear that the heart is contained within the body. This logic is called by Matte-Blanco "symmetrical" logic. It refers to the sequence of propositions that results from applying the PS to a given piece of quite acceptable traditional logic. Notice, therefore, that symmetrical logic appears in the propositional sequences of traditional logic whenever the PS makes itself present in its midst. In essence, then, this logic assumes traditional logic as operating all the time. On the other hand, it should be said that traditional logic assumes that symmetrical logic is operating all the time. Another important point about Bi-Logic here is that our thinking processes are combinations of traditional logic and symmetrical logic, in different proportions, depending on the level of depth of the appearance of symmetry. Thus, in a mathematical theorem, the level of traditional logic is very high and the level of symmetry very low, whereas in a psychotic piece of reasoning, such as the above example of the heart and body relation, the opposite happens. In reality, our thinking processes are classified as happening between two polar extremes: pure traditional logic and pure symmetry, both of them, of course, impossible to achieve. Therefore, there are many levels of symmetrical depth. Matte-Blanco discusses this idea in detail and systematically in his book *Thinking, Feeling and Being* (1988). In synthesis, he shows that, due to the proportions in which asymmetrical and symmetrical logic combine, it is possible to distinguish a series of strata or zones in the mind. He concludes that there are five basic strata or zones: a first zone in which asymmetrical logic predominates; a second one in which both logics appear in similar proportion; a third one in which the set is identified with its members; a fourth zone in which two or more sets are identified with each other; and finally, he refers to a fifth strata in which all sets tend to be identified with one another.

Matte-Blanco explores as well the way in which emotions relate to thinking, and

he concludes that emotional thinking is bi-logical, with a stronger predominance of symmetrical logic. I come back now to Michael Gilbert's theory of Multi-Modal Argumentation, in order to develop a Bi-Logical interpretation of emotional argumentation found in the propaganda of El Mercurio. Emotional arguments may be characterized as arguments in which emotions arise in a meaningful way, that is, emotions become the most important aspect of the argument. However, according to Matte-Blanco, when emotions appear, they involve a type of thinking which is symmetrical. The emotional state developed when being in love, for example, takes the person in love to think that the loved one is the most beautiful or handsome person in the world, and tends to attribute to him or her all the positive qualities that could be thought about. Evidently, asymmetrical thinking takes a lesser role here.

Now, which exactly is the nature of the emotional argumentation found in the propaganda of agitation of El Mercurio? I said that the assumption is that El Mercurio's propaganda, seen in its overall and comprehensive multi-modal shape, had the purpose of developing fear and hatred, especially in the middle classes and the military so that a coup d'état could be in place to overthrow Allende. The way in which these emotions were developed is highly subtle and sophisticated, for the whole campaign involved a set of invalid and valid logical arguments, fallacies of appeal to emotions, visual appeals in the layout of the pages, and kisceral connections. In synthesis, all of the above centered on the following emotional issues: the Marxists closely relate to crime, quartering and cannibalism. In that way, they destroy the very fabric of a society, and then the traditional sense of order is undermined. They do it, so that they can replace democracy with a Communist dictatorial system. There is in these highly charged emotional issues, an assemblage of points that are not at a clear level of asymmetrical understanding. I mean, it is logically acceptable to say that Marxists try to overthrow capitalist democratic regimes; it may be debatable, but there are historical and political precedents to assert that claim. Thus, it is only reasonable that people may develop fear, and indeed hatred, against the Marxists. These emotions possibly belong to the second strata mentioned above, one in which there seems to be a sort of balance between asymmetry and symmetry. However, the association of Marxists with crime is logically indefensible, and more problematic is the connection between Marxists and quartering and /or cannibalism. The emotions here correspond to deeper strata of the mind, where very little sense of asymmetry could be found. Most probably, in these strata the

anxieties are so strong and terrifying, that people may fall in states of sheer panic.

In my 1995 book (Durán, 1995), I discussed this topic as well from a traditional psychoanalytic perspective, using ideas derived from the clinical work of the Melanie Klein School. I cannot discuss this approach in any detail here, but I would like at least, to mention a few things about it. According to Matte-Blanco, some significant correlations can be made between the strata discussed above and clinical findings of other psychoanalytic schools. One of these correlations relates to intense fears of destruction of the body, of being torn apart, of cannibalistic impulses, etc. that are encountered in clinical practice, especially in Kleinian analysis. Moreover, some analysts of this school who have done clinical work with groups as opposed to individual therapy, claim that when the group fails, disintegrates, or is in danger, the above fears tend to increase. Indeed the Chilean society, in the Allende years, was in a serious critical state where people felt in great danger. Therefore, the fears that I have mentioned above were running rampant as well as strengthened by the propaganda of agitation of *El Mercurio*. Finally, those fears happened at the third and fourth strata of symmetrical depth given the confusion of sets entailed.

In the final part of this paper, I attempt to develop a way of evaluating the propaganda of agitation of *El Mercurio*. Indeed, it is possible to focus upon the logical arguments and decide on their validity and on the truth of the premises, if they are formal arguments, and/or on the nature of the informal fallacies that they may contain. Certainly, *El Mercurio*'s propaganda campaign would seem to be faulty in terms of an assessment in the logical mode, but this may be reductionist, for the propaganda of *El Mercurio* centers on the emotional mode as discussed above. Therefore, criteria for evaluation of emotional arguments need to be ascertained, and this is not something that has been done in the field of Multi-Modal Argumentation. One plausible approach to the evaluation of propaganda and emotional arguments is focusing upon their success.

Of course, many people would be prepared to say that *El Mercurio*'s propaganda of agitation against the government of Salvador Allende was successful, in that it contributed to mobilize the middle classes and the military in order to oust Allende. Indeed, these social sectors were mobilized because their way of life was in serious danger. Therefore, *El Mercurio*, as their representative, was right in its propaganda of agitation, since it was meant to defend them against a potential

traditional Communist dictatorship. The criterion implied here is that in the defense of a way of life, it is right to use deep emotional arguments against the aggressors.

However, this criterion seems to be missing an ethical clearance, so to speak. At this point, I would like to introduce an idea contributed by my colleague Leo Groarke from University of Windsor in Canada. In an e-mail exchange concerning the evaluation of emotional arguments, Groarke suggested that, "I argue that a plausible account of argument in informal contexts cannot reduce acceptability to 'acceptable as true', and that we need a broader notion of acceptability that recognizes moral and emotional elements of acceptability." Of course, the same idea would apply to the other two non-logical modes of argumentation in Gilbert's theory, but in the present paper, the issue relates only to the emotional mode. Applying this idea to the evaluation of El Mercurio's propaganda against Allende, a plausible interpretation can lead to the conclusion that for the upper classes, the middle classes and the military, the coup d'état was both, emotionally and ethically acceptable. Now, for the people who suffered the coup and the ensuing military repression of the Pinochet regime, the coup was both, emotionally and ethically unacceptable. Thus, so far, it is possible to claim that the coup was emotionally and ethically acceptable for some and not acceptable for others. However, is there a way of superseding the relativism of this conclusion? In order to examine this question, I believe it is necessary to inquire into the nature of the views of each side involved in the conflict.

Taking a rather common sense and ordinary experience in liberal-democratic societies, people have a chance to develop strong positive emotions about their lives. Thus, they will fight very hard against attempts to undermine the system, and then they would be prepared, most probably, to support a coup against a government who threatens to undermine the society. People are deeply attached to the liberal-democratic system in emotional and ethical terms.

However, what happens to the people who are undermining the social system? They seem to have emotional and ethical reasons as well in their attempts to replace it with another system, even if this is dictatorial. After all, these people have been excluded from the real and symbolic goods produced by the overall society. Therefore, they have not been able to develop the strong positive feelings that the upper and middle classes have developed. Their struggle is for access to share in the wealth of the society. Therefore, for them the coup is not emotionally

and ethically acceptable.

Thus, it seems that it is not possible to come out of the relativism of the claim that the coup, and the propaganda against Allende, was emotionally and ethically acceptable for one part of the society and not for another. In concluding the paper, it is clear that more research needs to be undertaken for the development of a thorough way of emotional and ethical evaluation of propaganda.

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