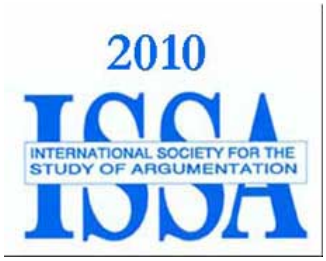
ISSA Proceedings 2010 – Emotional Arguments, Personality Theory, And Conflict Resolution



1. Introduction

In The Emotional mode of argumentation: descriptive, people-centered, and process-oriented I compile and discuss different types of emotional arguments that have been introduced in existing literature and demonstrate how they contribute to the overall goals of various argumentative dialogues. Following Hample, a fundamental belief which grounds this work is that, "people cannot reason without emotion and rarely experience emotion without reason. They are partners, not competitors" (2005, p. 127). I do this in an effort to push the argumentation community to acknowledge that emotional arguments can be credible sources of argument, and more importantly that they can help argumentation practitioners better understand, facilitate, or assess emotional arguments. Whether practitioners are analysts performing empirical studies of emotional arguments, professionals who deal with arguments continually as part and parcel to their work, or individuals confronting emotional arguments, that project is aimed chiefly at providing theoretical insights. It also begins to introduce practical tools that can help us with emotional arguments. In this paper, I summarize parts of a chapter on emotion, to demonstrate what is encapsulated by my notion of an emotional argument. This is entirely descriptive, and thus has no elements of normative analysis. Then, I discuss personality theories and connect them with emotional arguments. Finally, I introduce a family mediation case scenario, articulate some of its emotional arguments and discuss how the input of personality theory can help facilitate resolution of those arguments present.

2. Definition of emotional argument

I concentrate on arguments that have some sort of interaction where there is disagreement between parties, with a key element being that arguments require more than one individual, as there needs to be dissent. An emotional argument occurs when the dissent between interlocutors is of an emotional nature. Gilbert states that even though an emotional argument can be paraphrased into a logical

argument, “its force and persuasive power come almost entirely from its emotional aspect” (1997, p. 83). Ekman’s view on emotions supports this notion of emotional argumentation. He writes that, “we can have emotional reactions to thunder, music, loss of physical support, auto-erotic activity, etc. Yet . . . the primary function of emotion is to mobilize the organism to deal quickly with important interpersonal encounters, prepared to do so by what types of activity have been adaptive in the past” (Ekman 1999, p. 2). An emotional argument is a common occurrence. As humans, we are susceptible to feeling and intuiting our way, as well as disagreeing and arguing with each other. When a disagreement occurs between parties, emotions can be involved in a number of ways. For an argument to be emotional, it can contribute to the argumentative dialogue in any one of the five ways summarized below.

3. Types of emotional arguments summarized

The list below is a compilation of what other argumentation authors have already put forward with respect to emotion in argument. It is not an exhaustive list, and it should be further developed with the help of empirical research. I consider this a solid starting point for thinking about how emotions play a role in argumentation:

(i) Emotions can be used by an arguer to express an argument (Gilbert 1997).
(ii) Emotions can be used by an arguer as grounds for a claim (Ben-Ze’ev 1995; Gilbert 1997).
(iii) Emotions can make up an arguer’s claim (Plantin 1999).
(iv) Emotions of a listener can be elicited in the context of an argument:
– empathic emotions of the audience can be appealed to (Walton 1992);
– emotions of fear in an audience can be evoked (Walton 1992)

In my dissertation I demonstrate ways that these emotional types of argument can be a part of a particular argumentation dialogue. For this, I concentrate on Walton’s six dialogues (1998). By connecting the different types of emotional argument with the goals of each of Walton’s dialogues, one can better envision some ways that emotions play out in argumentation. Sometimes emotions do not enter into a critical discussion or a negotiation that turns to bargaining for the right “price,” but sometimes they are important to the arguers and the context. When this occurs, we need to understand their effects on the argument process, not to consider the emotion as extraneous to the dialogue.

4. Temperament Theory and Application

Personality Dimensions® (henceforth referred to as PD) is a personality assessment instrument that measures temperament. Temperament is defined as "an innate pattern or system of how a human being is organized psychologically that is revealed through characteristic behaviours, talents, values, and psychological needs" (Campbell 2002, p. 1). PD is based on ancient as well as modern research. It characterizes different personalities in a manner that can assist interlocutors or an impartial third party who is meant to aid interlocutors. Before summarizing some of the theoretical basis for PD, I want to emphasize – more for the skeptic of personality theory than anything – that PD is about preferences. While it categorizes personalities into four main temperaments, it does not pigeonhole an individual. We each have preferences for certain actions, thoughts, relationships, and so on; however, it does not follow that we cannot be successful at things outside of our preferences, or even that we always excel at something within our preference range. An awareness of PD theory and application can be used as a practical tool for negotiating understanding or agreement within argumentative spaces.

Theoretical background of PD

McKim (2003) draws connections and similarities among a number of theories from 400 BC to present day – theories about body fluids, societal roles, sources of happiness, personality types, to temperament types. These comparisons have been loosely articulated as backing for PD. Even though the theorists themselves studied different aspects of four main modes, and the relationships among the theories are not precise, there is substantial enough overlap to suggest PD is supported by research over the centuries (McKim 2003, p. 6). As Maddron writes.

> Over the centuries, these four elements of personality have interested people for the same reason that they interest us today. The four temperaments shed light on certain natural differences among people that make sense, differences that help us understand and relate to ourselves and the people around us. (2002, p. 10)

Greek physician Hippocrates (460 – 377 BC) theorized that human temperament was controlled by levels of body fluid (Garrison 1966). For example, an excess of phlegm resulted in a calmer temperament, while an excess of blood was synonymous with a more cheery temperament (Ibid.). In The Republic Plato (428 – 347 BC) discussed societal roles in an ideal society. The social roles he defined are: the rationals, the guardians, the idealists, and the artisans (Plato 1993). Aristotle (384 – 322 BC) looked at human temperament in terms of sources of

happiness, which he categorized as: dialectical types, proprietary types, ethical types, and hedonic types (1947). In the 1920s Jung (1875 – 1961) worked on psychological types. His research is the basis of several works on personality assessment that followed, including the well known and comprehensive Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®. Jung introduced the following four types: intellect-directed, body-directed, feeling-directed, and intuition-directed (Jung and Baynes 1921). Each of these authors presents a theory that relates to human temperament. Rather than connect the elements of each theory in any great detail, I refer you to McKim (2003).

Application of PD

Myers and Briggs, Lowry, and McKim each develop application practices stemming from their own research and partly from the theories skimmed above. Myers and Briggs were the first to bring personality types from the theoretical realm to the layperson (McKim 2003, p. 4). While they address sixteen different types, they categorize them into four temperaments: intuitive thinking, sensory judging, intuitive feeling, and sensory perceptive. Stationed in California, Lowry developed the True Colours ® temperament tool, and here in Canada McKim founded PD with the help of others' research. PD breaks down to the following four temperament types: Inquiring Greens – the Theorists, Organized Golds – the Stabilizers, Authentic Blues – the Catalysts, and Resourceful Oranges – the Improvisers. According to PD literature, we each have a preferred temperament style, though we often find ourselves functioning within all the temperament styles. This is an important point as it demonstrates that we each have a unique combination of the four temperaments, and none of us is relegated to a single category – that is, we all demonstrate aspects of all four types as required by our particular circumstances. In fact, "the four Colors, and the temperaments they represent, should be seen as a set of lenses for looking at the world. This is a very old set of lenses that has survived for thousands of years in more than one culture" (Ibid., p. 8).

Berens (2006) describes characteristics of the temperaments visually via temperament rings in Understanding Yourself and Others. At the core of a temperament ring are needs, followed by values, talents, and the outermost ring exemplifies behaviours. Berens writes: "the needs represent the basic psychological needs of the temperament, the driving force. Individuals, unconsciously and consciously seek every avenue to have these needs met" (2006,

p. 24). When an individual does not have her needs met, she may be dissatisfied or experience feelings of stress. I focus mainly on the core needs of each temperament.

Conflict management with PD

Conflict, and arguments that arise from it, can oftentimes be a product of personality differences (Neault & Pickerell 2007, p. 11). Knowledge of personality types and how they orient generally (this is something I'm currently researching and working on aside from this paper), in conflict, and with each other can help solve disagreements or even avoid conflict and arguments altogether. Berens writes, "People with different talents tend to take different approaches to the same situation, frequently resulting in conflict. This conflict can be productive and beneficial to a relationship, a family, or an organization. It can also be destructive" (2006, p. 28). The same goes for argumentation: people will obviously vary among their views on certain issues – this is nothing new in the discussion of arguments, but with different dispositions, or temperaments, they will likely take different approaches in communicating arguments too. This, on the other hand, is newer territory in argumentation, as it implies that there could be various argumentative methods, and thus a single theory of argumentation may not truly capture or understand some argumentative dynamics. When these differences come together in argumentation, the dialogues can be productive and beneficial to the relationships between interlocutors, as it can result in learning about issues, and more importantly about oneself and others with whom she argues. These differences in argumentation can be destructive too though, when interlocutors are at a crossroads, unable to resolve or even communicate effectively with each other because they have different preferences and are unable to coalesce these differences. This includes different views, different notions of a situation in which a view may stem, different feelings towards issues, and different manners in dealing with issues.

Understanding temperament theory, which PD explains and categorizes, offers knowledge about human nature, at the level of the interlocutor as opposed to the argument. This might not directly shed light on the analysis of arguments, for example it may not assist in determining whether premises strongly support their conclusions, however, it can facilitate communication so that arguments can be made in different manners, resulting in them being understandable to more than just the utterer of the argument, or just palatable even, to different temperament types. Divorce mediators or lawyers, teachers dealing with schoolyard

disagreements, managers at the workplace, customer service representatives, friends, family members, and neighbours can benefit in argumentative interactions from understanding temperaments. Even if an interlocutor is unaware of another individual's preferences, at the very least knowledge of one's own preferences, and the strengths and weaknesses that accompany them, can facilitate better argumentative communication.

I suggest that PD is a helpful tool for arguers and/or their third party practitioners. PD puts the focus on arguers, validating that they are the makers of arguments, and arguments are simply by-products of their communication, as well as focusing on the audiences. PD recognizes that there is something unique about an interlocutor's communication of and understanding of arguments; for the field this prompts the question: how can we have universal notions of good reasoning when we do not all approach the practice of reasoning in the same manner? The addition of PD as a tool and the corresponding criticism it elicits of the tradition allows for a more inclusive approach to arguments, open-minded enough to accept the ambiguous argumentative map that results.

Some argumentation scholars have posited models or theories of argumentation that inadvertently support the use of PD. Gilbert's multi-modal approach overlaps with the temperaments. For instance, the theorists would be more inclined to argue using the logical mode, while the catalysts prefer to make arguments that stem from how they are feeling about an issue. Willard's theory on argument fields denotes a picture of arguments in which the diversity of arguers actually steers arguments. From this perspective, taking a look at arguers from the stance of PD is plausible, and likely helpful in understanding an argument's social dynamic.

I have already mentioned that PD should not be taken as a rigorous, universal tool that labels arguers, but that the temperaments can function as one of the lenses we have at our disposal to navigate through argumentative discourse. Obviously, it is within the spirit of this approach that other tools can be introduced and used, especially because we may not all connect with PD. I end this section on PD with an extensive quotation from Maddron, who I think captures the essence of PD in a productive manner:

These lenses demonstrate certain natural differences among people. These natural differences can be appreciated and accepted. And as we all know only too well, these differences can also be argued about, rejected, and fought over.

The good news is that when we decide to appreciate and accept these natural differences, much of the trouble seems to go out of life. New understanding and new acceptance of others follow closely on the heels of a new attitude about the self – new pictures and stories. New pathways open up. Strengths are discovered. Limitations are accepted. Cooperation is improved. We move from conflict to an appreciation of our natural differences. (2002, p. 8)

1. Case Scenario

A mother and her son were diverted to mediation after the mother pressed threat of assault charges on her 17 year old son. The two had been having family disagreements over an extended period of time. One particular evening, a disagreement about household chores led to the son becoming quite angry; enraged, he picked up a broom stick and held it. Mom, becoming fearful of her son's capabilities, locked the door and called the police as soon as her son left the house to "cool off."

During mediation Mom's main concerns were her son's education, as his grades were slipping, his lack of interest in piano (he started playing piano before he could read music), and the fact that her son did not always listen to and obey her. The main concerns the son shared were his lack of privacy in their home, and his mother's favoritism of his younger sister, who still played piano.

The threat of assault, the reason the mediation was taking place, was hardly mentioned, nor was it a real concern for any of the parties. The only time either of them addressed the event that led to the son's charge was when the mediators tried to discuss the charge (a main goal of the crown-recommended mediation). The son had no intention of actually touching his mother, and the mother was not in fear of being hurt by her son.

Domestic squabbles were discussed, in an effort to reach a resolution, get the son back into the family home and back to his classes, but when the son felt like his mother just wanted to control him, he said that he would rather go to a court and judge, and risk a possible charge, than work anything out with his mother in mediation. What led to the son's (temporary) departure from the mediation was his mother's implicit threats that he had to promise to behave in certain ways for his mother to consider a resolution.

While the mediation took several meetings and has been significantly shortened

from the actual dialogues that occurred, it is hopefully easy to acknowledge the presence of the emotional mode that can take over such an interaction. The mediation fluctuated mainly between persuasive dialogues (parties trying to convince the mediators of their stories) and eristic dialogues (between the parties). Each of the parties present arguments that try to elicit empathy in the mediators. When the mother implicitly threatened her son's freedom from a criminal charge in exchange for promising to attend college and drop his passion for visual arts, an appeal to fear became present. This almost ended the mediation early, without any settlement. In response, the son wanted to end the mediation prematurely, an emotional reaction/argument, and evoked the same type of fear in the mother. I focus on these ad baculums to make my point in this paper. Neither mother nor son really intended or wanted for their implicit threats to actually occur. That is, mom wanted her son's criminal record to be cleared, so he could start fresh, and eventually gain employment without any hitches related to his criminal past. The son in this case shared with the mediators (only) that he wanted to move back home and finish high school. He was stressed living across town with a family member. He wanted to finish high school and have the option of studying Law & Society as back-up, in case his career as an artist did not prove financially fruitful. Their actual goals were not so conflictual.

The mediators, noting the ad baculums, articulated the core needs of each party. It was obvious that the son needed a sense of freedom from his mother. He felt stifled. This need for freedom to make decisions can be a core need for some. In terms of PD, when this need is threatened, an individual is "stressed" and may respond in a manner that is hasty and/or aggressive. Noting this, the mediators refocused discussion on the son's need for personal space and decision-making – neither of which were directly related to the charge that had to be resolved.

The mother in this case appeared as if she was just trying to gain control of her son. Deeper questions and discussions in caucus, however, revealed that she needed her son on an emotional level. She wanted him to accept her decisions about her personal life (i.e. her current relationship). She also wanted him to stay connected to his sister and herself, which she felt was not present. Her reaction to getting these needs of acceptance and connection fulfilled was to force him to stay at the home and do as she said. Noting this, the mediators also facilitated a discussion that revealed this to the son. I cannot stress that neither party was aware of the other's needs. The ad baculums presented catalysts towards a

resolution that seemed impossible at one point. Without recognizing them, the dialogue was falling apart rapidly. Why is this connected to personality theory at all? We do not all respond to the same situation or relationship in the same manner – being able to note and work through core needs allows for a better understanding of each other, and in this case, reframing arguments so that they did not scare and/or threaten the parties. I go further and argue that dismissing ad baculums as bad (or irrational arguments), instead of emotional ones, dismisses these arguers' means of communicating their dissent.

6. Conclusion

When arguments become primarily emotional, as they were in this case, productive dialogue necessitates acknowledging and working with emotional arguments, if for no other reason than for the parties' satisfaction. I maintain that using PD as a tool for emotional argumentative discourse, particularly argumentative dialogues that need resolutions, should be given consideration, as it can help argument practitioners navigate their paths through contentious emotional territory.

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