

# Emotions as Objects of Argumentative Constructions

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**Abstract** This paper takes part in the ongoing debate on how emotions can be dealt with by argumentation theory. Its main goal is to formulate a relationship between emotion and argumentation which differs from that usually found in most of the literature on the subject. In the “standard” conception, emotions are seen as the objects of appeals which function as *adjuvants* to argumentation: speakers appeal to pity, fear, shame and the like in order to enhance the cogency of an argument which bears on *something else*—whether it be the validity of a disputable opinion or the opportunity of a course of action. According to the “alternative” conception which I propose to consider, emotions *themselves* may be viewed, in some cases, as *the very objects of argumentation*. This conception lays emphasis on the *arguability* of emotions. Drawing on insights from current psychological and philosophical theories, it involves a reassessment of the Aristotelian concept of *pathos*, as well as an in-depth critical discussion of normative and descriptive approaches to emotional appeals.

**Keywords** Argumentation · Cognition · Emotion · *Pathos* · Rationality

While it has long been adequate to label emotion as the “poor relation” of argumentation studies, an overall view of the current state of the field suggests that the situation is undergoing rapid change. Indeed, for the past fifteen years, emotion has progressively been constituted as a legitimate object of research by several argumentation theorists. What is remarkable, in this respect, is that this growing interest for emotion crosses the boundary between normative and descriptive approaches to argumentation. From a normative point of view, the analyst’s tasks include an evaluation of arguments’ merits: what is at stake is to identify criteria

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which allow to distinguish between “reasonable” and “fallacious” uses of argument (whether these criteria pertain to logico-deductive validity and/or to pragmatic appropriateness). Following this line of thought, scholars have discussed emotional appeals within the framework of a pragmatic theory of *fallacies* (Walton 1992, 1997, 2000) and, more recently, within that of “normative pragmatics” (Manolescu 2006). From a descriptive point of view, the analyst seeks to describe the functioning of argument without passing judgment on its degree of reasonableness. Often anchored in fields such as linguistics, discourse analysis and communication studies, descriptive approaches primarily aim to do justice to the different forms which argumentation may take in various discourse genres and interaction contexts. In this perspective, significant attempts have been made to bring out the “inseparability of reason and emotion” in a descriptive model of argumentation based on the notions of interaction and disagreement between speakers (Plantin 1997, 1998, 1999, 2004).

The present paper is not a state-of-the-art review of how emotions are considered in argumentation theories, although it discusses some of the most significant contributions in the field. Its main goal is to formulate a relationship between emotion and argumentation which differs from that usually found in most of the literature on the subject. More precisely, I argue that there exists a “standard” conception of the emotion-argumentation relationship, which I do not intend to belittle, but rather to complement with an “alternative” one. In the “standard” conception, emotions are seen as the objects of *appeals* and these appeals are thought to function as *external adjuvants*<sup>1</sup> to argumentation. Speakers appeal to pity, fear, shame and the like in order to enhance the cogency of an argument which bears on *something else*—whether it be the validity of a disputable opinion or the opportunity of a suggested course of action. As I will try to demonstrate, this conception presupposes a questionable disjunction between *pathos* and *logos*. According to the “alternative” conception which I propose to consider, emotions *themselves* may sometimes be seen as the *very objects* of argumentation : in such cases, speakers do not so much “appeal” to emotions as they formulate the reasons why they feel (or do not feel) a particular emotion and why this particular emotion should (or should not) legitimately be felt. This alternative conception lays emphasis on the *arguability* of emotions, and follows Michael Gilbert’s claim that “once we stop thinking of arguing about emotions as inherently different from arguing about anything else, the path [...] to creating models [...] becomes manageable” (2005, p. 50). Drawing on and trying to deepen Christian Plantin’s pioneer work, I develop the idea that emotions can be viewed as the objects of *argumentative constructions*.

I start by discussing how current psychological and philosophical theories highlight the cognitive dimension of emotions, and how they can better our understanding of a possible *arguability* of emotions (Sect. 1). I then turn to the rhetorical tradition and propose a reassessment of the Aristotelian concept of *pathos* (Sect. 2). As has been noted several times in scholarly work on Aristotle but much less

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<sup>1</sup> This word might seem somewhat unusual in this context: I simply use it in the sense of “a thing that aids or help”.

often by argumentation theorists, this concept implies that insofar as they have cognitive antecedents, emotions *themselves* are accessible to the argumentation process. I then move to modern argumentation theories, (Sect. 3), and seek to bring out how emotions are dealt with within normative frameworks. After raising several objections against normative accounts of emotional appeals (Sects. 3.1, 3.2), I present the hypothesis of an argumentative construction of emotions in some detail (Sect. 4).

## 1 The Cognitive Component of Emotions and the Possibility of Rational Assessment

A look at contemporary psychological and philosophical approaches to emotions reveals two prominent issues which seem relevant for argumentation theory: scholars focus on the *cognitive* component of emotions and ask whether- and, if so, how-they can be assessed in terms of *rationality*.

In the field of psychology, there is an increasing consensus according to which emotions are not reducible to mere *physiological* phenomena. At the end of the nineteenth century, William James, a pioneer of modern psychology, viewed emotions as “bodily changes”. This trend has been largely reversed, mainly under the influence of what is known as *appraisal theory* (Frijda 1986; Lazarus 1984; Scherer 1984, 1999). Obviously, psychologists do not contest that emotions are *to a certain extent* physiological processes. Their point is, first, that physiological processes should be considered as a *component* of emotions<sup>2</sup> and, secondly, that this component does not suffice to properly define the various *emotion types* (fear, shame, pity and the like):<sup>3</sup>

A central tenet of appraisal theory is the claim that emotions are elicited and differentiated on the basis of a person’s subjective evaluation (or *appraisal*) of the personal significance of a situation, object or event on a number of dimensions or criteria. (Scherer 1999, p. 637)

Appraisal theorists thus lay emphasis on the cognitive component of emotions and insist on its explanatory power: not only does it allow to better understand what emotions *are*, but it also provides tools to determine what emotions *there are*. As Scherer explains, the idea is to identify the “criteria” involved in the evaluation process (the novelty of the event, its intrinsic pleasantness, the probability or uncertainty of its outcome, its agency, its being controllable or not, its compatibility with social norms, etc.) and to pin down typical “*profiles* of appraisal” (*ibid.*, p. 638) associated with particular emotions. To take but one example, indignation typically requires that the criterion of agency be activated, for it seems difficult to experience indignation without imputing the responsibility for a painful situation to an agent.

<sup>2</sup> Psychologists usually speak of “physiological activation” or “physiological arousal”.

<sup>3</sup> The philosopher Jon Elster shares this point of view: while admitting that “visceral arousal is an important criterion for deciding that a state is an emotion and not a simple belief-desire complex”, he claims that “we cannot use fine-grained differences in arousal patterns to decide whether the organism is experiencing envy or indignation, anger or hatred, etc.” (1999, p. 247).

The relationship between emotion and cognition is also at the heart of contemporary philosophical research and it seems correct to divide emotion theories into two main categories: those who hold a *cognitive* view of emotional phenomena, on the one hand, and those who do not, on the other.<sup>4</sup> With regard to the former, one can distinguish between radical and more moderate versions. According to radical versions, emotions are *essentially* cognitive phenomena and can thus be conceptually reduced to a set of beliefs and judgments concerning a state of affairs: for instance, in *Upheavals of Thought. The Intelligence of Emotions*, Martha Nussbaum (2003) claims that emotion should be defined as a particular form of “judgments of value” and that “non-cognitive elements” such as “bodily sensations” are marginal in defining its core features. According to moderate versions, emotions are multifaceted phenomena which can be characterized in terms of several features, among which *cognitive antecedents* play a significant part.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, the idea is that whereas they should not be conceptually reduced to beliefs or judgments, emotions generally presuppose such cognitive phenomena.

The aim of this paper is not to offer a complete overview of emotion theories, nor to engage in a fully fledged discussion of the complex relationship between cognition and emotion: there is much debate concerning what is meant by “cognition” in the case of emotions<sup>6</sup> and cognitive theories are faced with a number of recurrent objections.<sup>7</sup> There is, however, an increasing acceptance among scholars in psychology and philosophy that emotions are—at least in part—cognitive phenomena and cannot be reduced to mere physiological reactions. My aim is to evaluate the possible consequences of this “cognitive” view of emotions for argumentation theory. (i) If they involve a process of evaluation, emotions should not only be viewed in terms of their subsequent *impact on cognition*: it is not enough to discuss the effects which emotions may have on the rationality of beliefs and judgments. One should recognize, first, that emotions originally stem from cognition: to a certain extent, they are rooted in cognitive evaluation. (ii) This last statement has a major consequence, namely that “emotions *themselves* can be assessed as more or less rational, *independently of their impact on choice and belief*

<sup>4</sup> Tappolet follows this division in her clear and well-informed overview of emotion theories (2006, p. 365). In *Les Passions* (2004), Hugon-Talon distinguishes between «les théories jugementalistes [selon lesquelles] les passions supposent des croyances et des jugements» and «les théories anti-jugementalistes [qui] réfèrent les passions à une cause exclusivement somatique» (2004, pp. 40–41).

<sup>5</sup> In *Alchemies of the Mind. Rationality and the Emotions*, Elster lists seven features: (1) *qualitative feel*, (2) *cognitive antecedents*, (3) *an intentional object*, (4) *physiological arousal*, (5) *physiological expressions*, (6) *valence*, (7) *characteristic action tendencies* (1999, p. 246).

<sup>6</sup> The problem has to do with the *degree of consciousness* which concepts such as “cognition”, “evaluation” and “appraisal” imply in the case of emotions: critics argue that it is improbable that elaborate and reflexive cognitive processes are carried out in the few milliseconds that are sometimes sufficient to see an emotion emerge. Scherer addresses this accusation of “excessive cognitivism” and specifies that “many appraisal processes may occur below the degree of consciousness” (1999, p. 642).

<sup>7</sup> Most importantly, one can point to the problem of *disjunction*. First, an emotion may persist even if the corresponding belief is not—or no longer—held by the subject: I may experience fear in the presence of spiders even if I do not believe for a second that they represent any threat to my well-being. Secondly, the presence of a belief does not necessarily entail the expected emotion: I may firmly believe that a future event constitutes a genuine threat to my well-being without experiencing fear at all (see Ogien 2003, pp. 154–156 and Tappolet 2000, pp. 145–162 for a review of the main objections to cognitive theories).

formation” (Elster 1999, p. 284, my emphasis). Argumentation theory should thus pay attention to how speakers assess the rationality of emotions and, above all, it should be able to describe how they justify such assessments. When they engage in argumentation, speakers may contest the rationality of their opponent’s emotion by attacking the beliefs and judgments in which this emotion appears to be grounded. When their own emotion is called into question, they may verbalize the type of evaluation which underlies it and which—in their view—confers it with a rational basis. All in all, a “cognitive” view implies that emotions are *accessible to argumentation*: they do not by essence fall outside its jurisdiction, so to speak. As I will argue below, the legitimacy of an emotion can be questioned during an interaction and in this case, speakers will sometimes give reasons which support or, conversely, invalidate the said emotion.

## 2 The Arguability of Emotions in the Rhetorical Tradition

At first sight, the rhetorical tradition may not seem to be the best place to look for a possible arguability of emotions. Indeed, the typical orator is not concerned with putting arguments forward in order to support a given emotion, but rather with *using* emotional appeals so that his arguments achieve maximal persuasion. In this section, I argue that although it primarily views emotion as an effective adjunct to argumentation, rhetoric also indirectly conveys the idea that emotions *themselves* are *accessible to argumentation*.

Let us look very briefly<sup>8</sup> at the main features of the concept of *pathos*, as defined in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*<sup>9</sup> and in the work of his Latin followers. According to Aristotle’s famous definition, rhetoric may be defined as “an ability, in each [particular case], to see the available means of persuasion” (I, 2, 1355b). The Stagirite claims that that these “means of persuasion” can be divided into “three species”: “Some are in the character of the speaker, and some in *disposing the listener in some way*, and some in the speech itself, by showing or seeming to show something” (I, 2, 1356a, my emphasis). It is, as the reader will have recognized, the famous trichotomy between *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. In its broadest sense, the term “pathos” has to do with the idea of change, movement or alteration. More specifically, it denotes a state of the mind, when the latter is altered by an external cause : in this respect, as Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani (2000, pp. 49–52) points out in her semantic analysis of the term, latin equivalents such as *motus animi* (“movement of the mind”) and *perturbatio animi* (“perturbation of the mind”) are very clear. What exactly does this change consist of, and how does it help to achieve persuasion? “Persuasion”, as Aristotle explains, may come “through the hearers, when they are led to feel emotion by the speech; for we do not give the same judgment when grieved or rejoicing or when being friendly or hostile” (I, 2, 1356a). Here, we find one of the crucial features of *pathos*, namely its *impact on cognition*. It is exemplified in the very definition of *pathos*, which the philosopher

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed account of the concept of *pathos* in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, see Wisse (1989).

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, translated by George Kennedy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

gives at the beginning of Book 2: “The emotions are those things through which, by undergoing change, people come to differ on their judgments and which are accompanied by pleasure or pain” (II, 2, 1378a, my emphasis). In a rhetorical situation, the audience ultimately has to pass judgment on a given case. Through a skillful use of *pathos*, the orator modifies the audience’s disposition to pass judgment so that it favors the cause which he wants to see prevail. From such a perspective, emotions are reputed to have *effects* on the audience’s cognitive faculties: they tend to bias the formation of beliefs, the passing of judgment and the decision-making process. Discussing effects is not enough, however, and a detailed examination of *pathos* yields further results concerning the relationship between emotion and cognition. Simply put, the point which I would like to make is the following: rhetoric not only teaches us that emotions have *cognitive effects*, but also, and crucially, that they have *cognitive origins*. True, the very definition of *pathos* which appears at the beginning of Book 2 clearly focuses on the first side of the issue: emotions are the source of *variations of judgment*. Yet this general definition is not representative of how Aristotle describes particular emotions in the rest of Book 2:

[This definition] is misleading [...] because it defines emotions by their impact on cognition rather than by the fact that they are shaped by cognition. When Aristotle considers specific emotions, he consistently analyzes them in terms of their cognitive antecedents rather than in terms of their consequences for cognition. (Elster 1999, p. 55)

While Mathieu-Castellani is right when she asserts that rhetoric investigates the role of the passions in the formation of judgment («le rôle des passions dans la formation du jugement» 2000, p. 198), one could be tempted to reverse the phrase and say that rhetoric also investigates “the role of judgment in the formation of the passions”. Indeed, when Aristotle discusses a particular emotion, he systematically asks the following questions: (i) What is the “state of mind” of the person who experiences this emotion?; (ii) *Who* does he or she experience it *about*?; (iii) For “what sort of reasons”? (II, 2, 1356a). The second question lays emphasis on the fact that emotions have *intentional objects*. The third question suggests that intentional objects give rise to a set of beliefs and judgments which somehow justify<sup>10</sup> the given emotion. The Aristotelian analysis of the *pathê* basically consists in coupling each particular emotion with a prototypical situation—or, more precisely, with a *prototypical evaluation of a situation*. Let us take the example of pity (*eleos*):

Let pity be defined as a certain pain at an apparently destructive or painful event happening to one who does not deserve it and which a person might expect himself or one of his own to suffer, and this when it seems close at hand; for it is clear that a person who is going to feel pity necessarily thinks that some evil is actually present of the sort that he or one of his own might suffer and that this evil is of the sort mentioned in the definition or like it or about equal to it. (II, 8, 1385b)

<sup>10</sup> The beliefs and judgments justify the emotion *in the eyes of the person who feels it*. They are, however, open to criticism when speakers engage in argumentation—and that is what concerns me here.

It seems clear, from this quotation, that an emotion requires what Elster calls “cognitive antecedents”. If we follow Aristotle, in order to feel pity, one must entertain certain beliefs and judgments. First, one must judge someone else’s misfortune as being undeserved. Second, one must believe that such a misfortune is not unlikely to fall on oneself or on one’s relatives. The point, here, is not to discuss Aristotle’s definition of pity per se. It is to bring out his *method* of analysis, which suggests, to use Elster’s terms, that emotions are “shaped in cognition”: they depend on the evaluation of a situation and rest on a set of beliefs and judgments regarding this situation.

There are two consequences to be drawn from this concept of emotion. (i) The first and the most obvious one is *pragmatic*. Rhetoric is a *techné* which is used in order to reach a specific goal, namely persuading an audience. In this respect, *pathos* is, as we have seen, one of the three “means” which are “available” to achieve persuasion. If he is to use *pathos* effectively, the orator must have an understanding of how emotions work, so to speak: he cannot put his audience in a state of fear, say, without a knowledge of the set of beliefs and judgments which are most commonly associated with this particular emotion. In other words, analyzing the *pathé* in terms of their cognitive antecedents provides the orator with tools to “dispose the listener in some way” (I, 2, 1356a) and reach his persuasive goal. (ii) There is a second and less obvious consequence which, although not directly stated by Aristotle, is fundamental: *if emotions do have cognitive antecedents, then they are not by essence impervious to argument*. While it has received little attention so far in argumentation theory,<sup>11</sup> this idea has been developed by some important Aristotle scholars in the field of philosophy:

[Aristotle] describes emotions as closely bound up with judgments, and therefore capable of being modified by a modification of judgment. This picture implies not only that emotions can play a role in rational deliberation, but also that they can be changed as beliefs of all sorts can be changed, by deliberation and argument. (Nussbaum 1996, p. 318)<sup>12</sup>

By construing thought or belief as the efficient cause of emotion, Aristotle showed that emotional response is intelligent behavior open to reasoned persuasion. When men are angered, they are not victims of some totally irrational force. Rather they are responding in accordance with the thought of unjust insult. Their belief may be erroneous and their anger unreasonable, but their behavior is intelligent and cognitive in the sense that *it is grounded upon a belief which may be criticized and even altered by argumentation*. (Fortenbaugh 2002, p. 17, my emphasis)

It could be questioned whether argument *actually* succeeds in “modif[ying]”, “chang[ing]” or “alter[ing]” a given emotion: this has to do with the question of *perlocutionary effect*, which is not relevant here. What is important, however, is that emotions are *open to dispute* and fall within the realm of argumentation. A person

<sup>11</sup> With the exception of Christian Plantin’s work, on which I come back in Sect. 4.

<sup>12</sup> For a similar argument, see Elster in his chapter “Aristotle on the emotions”: “If emotions [...] depend on beliefs, they are amenable to rational argument designed to change the belief” (1999, p. 56).



can contest the validity of another person's emotion by attacking the judgments and the beliefs which this emotion appears to be "bound up with", to use Nussbaum's terms. In return, the other person can justify his emotion by defending the beliefs and judgments in question. According to Stephen Leighton, it is precisely their *accessibility to argumentation* which separates emotions (*pathé*) from "desires" or "appetites" (*epithumia*):<sup>13</sup>

[A]nother utilization of the difference between *epithumia* and emotion has to do with the obedience of emotion, but not *epithumia*, to reason. [...N]ot only might you convince a person not to act on their emotion, say, fear, but also might you talk the person out of it. This latter you might do by convincing them that one of their judgments whence their fear arose was wrong [...W]hile we give grounds for emotions, we only give causes for thirst and other *epithumia*. Thus the former, but not the latter, is, in this sense, conquered by argument. Thus it is the former, but not the latter, that Aristotle concerns himself with and explains the grounds upon which they are felt. (Leighton 1996, pp. 226–227)

Again, it remains to be seen whether argumentation is *in fact* effective in "talk[ing] a person out of [his emotion]". The point, here, is that it is possible to retrieve the judgments "whence [an emotion] ar[ises]" and to question them. In other words, it is not necessary to go as far as to say that argumentation is able to "convince" someone not to feel an emotion: such a statement would raise empirical objections—e.g. that emotions may linger in spite of the "grounds" which are given against them. As I have already said, the perlocutionary issue is not of concern here. My point is solely that emotions may become *disputable matters* during interaction: *their adequacy may be challenged and, consequently, speakers may put forward claims which either seek to justify or to undermine them.*<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> This point, however, is a bit more complex than it seems. It should be added that *within certain limits* "desires" and "appetites", too, can become the object of argumentative discourse. The main issue would then certainly be their *resistibility* ("Can desires and appetites be resisted?", "Should desires and appetites be resisted, and if so, how?", etc.). To put it simply, speakers may argue about *how to properly deal with them*. The same goes for emotions, obviously, the crucial difference being that speakers may also argue about an emotion's *intrinsic rationality or legitimacy*, and thus evaluate whether or not it is grounded on good reasons. In the case of "desires" and "appetites", an evaluation in terms of *goodness of reasons* seems more difficult, if not impossible.

<sup>14</sup> This can be illustrated by a short example of contemporary political discourse. During the last French presidential debate (May 2, 2007), Nicolas Sarkozy was opposed to Ségolène Royal. A particular episode of the debate was largely commented by the media in the following days. During a discussion concerning the social integration of handicapped children, Sarkozy promised that he would do everything in his power to "give each of these children a place in the schools". Royal then vehemently denounced her opponent's "political immorality", because, she argued, Sarkozy himself had suppressed a series of measures destined to help handicapped children at the time he was serving as Minister of the Interior. Royal asserted that she was "very angry", while Sarkozy suggested that his opponent's "anger" was groundless and did not rest on good reasons: "I don't know why Mrs. Royal is getting angry", "I don't understand why Mrs. Royal, who's usually calm, has lost her temper" («Je ne sais pas pourquoi Madame Royal s'énerve», «Je ne comprends pas pourquoi Madame Royal, d'habitude calme, a perdu ses nerfs»). Royal then sought to justify her emotion and to show that it was indeed grounded in reason: "Some angers are healthy, because they correspond to people's suffering" («Il y a des colères saines, parce qu'elles correspondent à la souffrance des gens»). She even went as far as to claim a disposition toward



To sum up, rhetoric presents us with a twofold relationship between emotion, cognition and argumentation. On the one hand, *pathos* functions as an *adjuvant to argumentation*: if skillfully used, it helps to achieve persuasion, for it affects the audience's beliefs and judgments in the desired way. On the other hand, the very concept of *pathos* indirectly suggests that emotions *themselves* are open to argumentation, for they rest on beliefs and judgments about an intentional object.

### 3 Emotion in Modern Argumentation Theories: Two Perspectives

After discussing the rhetorical concept of *pathos*, I would like to find out whether, and if so how, modern argumentation theories investigate the arguability of emotions. Does the idea according to which emotions are somehow *accessible to argumentation* receive any explicit attention in argumentation theory?

#### 3.1 The Rejection of Emotional Appeals as Illegitimate Substitutes for Argument

Normative approaches often take up a stance which sees emotional appeals as *illegitimate substitutes* for argument. These two terms need some explanation: why are emotional appeals deemed illegitimate and how exactly do they act as substitutes? According to several argumentation theorists, emotional appeals fail to meet what Trudy Govier calls the "relevance condition" (1997, pp. 73–75): they neither count for nor against the claim which is in dispute and have no bearing on its acceptability. As Govier explains, emotional appeals are deceiving insofar as they put the audience under the impression that reasons have actually been given for or against the disputable claim *whereas it is not the case*. However "irrelevant", they are able to affect the audience's disposition to pass judgment.<sup>15</sup>

Some poor arguments trade on *emotionally charged language*. [...] The substitution of emotionally charged language for argument is [...] quite common. If situations are described in emotionally negative language, we tend to assume that something is wrong, whereas if they are described in emotionally positive language, we tend to think everything is fine. [...]

What we should be on watch for is emotionally charged language that conveys a view on a controversial point where the point is in question and no supporting evidence is put forward. (1997, pp. 117–118)

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Footnote 14 continued

anger, thus highlighting the fact that this particular emotion is at the heart of political action: "There will be times when I'll be angry, even when I am President of the Republic" («Il y a des colères que j'aurai, même quand je serai Présidente de la République»).

<sup>15</sup> It should be noticed that normative argumentation theorists are often very close to rhetoricians when it comes to describing the *cognitive impact* of emotional appeals. The essential difference is praxeological: while the latter often recommend to take advantage of it in order to maximize persuasion, the former discourage it in the name of an ideal of reasonable argumentation.

To sum up, emotional appeals tend to short-circuit the argument proper, so to speak, and this without the audience knowing, for they are able to mask their own irrelevance. In the pragma-dialectical model, van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004, p. 192) also view emotional appeals as fallacies of relevance: they violate one of the ten “rules of critical discussion”, namely that “a standpoint may not be defended by an argumentation which is not relevant to the standpoint”.<sup>16</sup> Categorizing emotional appeals as illegitimate substitutes for argument carries, I will argue, two questionable assumptions. First, it presupposes that argumentation—in its most agreed-upon sense, as the act of justifying a disputable standpoint by putting forward a set of claims which support it—and emotional appeals are two *perfectly discrete* and even *mutually exclusive* processes: when emotions are appealed to, we are outside the jurisdiction of argument, so to speak, and reciprocally, when a *proper* argument is offered, there is not any appeal to emotion, or rather there *should not* be one. Yet such a dichotomy is highly debatable. Indeed—and this is my main point—emotional appeals may very well be *argumentative*, in the sense that a speaker may put forward a set of claims which seek to justify the legitimacy of her emotion and offer reasons why it should be felt.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, emotional appeals are often described as part of “irrelevant premises” (Govier 1997, p. 170) which sometimes achieve to impose a conclusion for which they provide no adequate support and on which they in fact have no bearing at all. Yet it is not always correct to presuppose that emotional appeals are “located” in the premises. In some cases, we have an argument whose *conclusion* states that an emotion is or should be felt, and whose premises offer reasons why this particular emotion is or should *legitimately* be felt. In a groundbreaking article which probably has not received all the attention it deserves by argumentation scholars, Brinton (1988, p. 212) argues that appealing to emotion might very well be “reason-giving”: in this case, it “treats the emotion (or the proposition that you ought to undergo the emotion) as a conclusion” and gives “reasons” for feeling this emotion.

### 3.2 An Acceptance Under Conditions

Within the realm of normative approaches, Douglas Walton’s work (1992, 1997, 2000) offers the most nuanced and detailed account of emotional appeals in

<sup>16</sup> See however Gilbert (2005) for an attempt to integrate emotions into the pragma-dialectic model.

<sup>17</sup> It should be added here that speakers do not only offer argumentative constructions of emotions *which they claim to be feeling during the argumentative discussion*. True, the two processes often go hand in hand: speakers try to justify an emotion which, at the same time, they attribute to themselves. However, it is possible for speakers to argue about an emotion which they do not claim to be experiencing. It is even possible for them to argue about the general value of an emotion without allowing the experience of it or the appeal to it in the argumentative discussion (for example, in a philosophical debate, speakers may argue about the general value of anger in the conduct of practical reason). As will appear in Sect. 4, the cases which interest me most are those where *speakers argue for or against a particular emotion which they attribute to themselves or to their opponents*.

argumentative discourse. It firmly rejects the negative ontology which dismisses emotional appeals on the sole ground that they are emotional appeals and cannot thus be anything but fallacious. Walton claims that “there is nothing wrong per se with appeals to emotion in argumentation, even though appeals to emotion can go wrong and be exploited in some cases” (1992, p. 257). It is important to notice that Walton does not consider emotional appeals as fallacious *a priori*: in his view, potential fallacies lie in *contextual uses* of emotional appeals, but not in their very essence. Far from an essentialist perspective, Walton aims to sort out the “right” uses of emotional appeals from the “wrong” ones: his contribution is “a normative analysis of the conditions under which appeals to emotion are used correctly or incorrectly in argumentation” (1992, p. 28). In order to be properly understood, this normative approach to emotional appeals is to be situated within the more general framework of Walton’s theory of fallacies. Following the revised version of this theory, arguments are evaluated as “reasonable” or “fallacious” according to *communicative norms* rather than according to universal logical standards: Walton claims that fallacies are “technique[s] of argumentation that may in principle be reasonable, but that ha[ve] been misused in a given case in such a way that [they go] strongly against or hinde[r] the goals of dialogue” (1992, p. 18). This definition suggests that in order to pin down a fallacy, the analyst first needs to subsume the context in which speakers are interacting under a *normative model of dialogue* and then determine whether or not a given argument is in compliance with the rules set by this model of dialogue. Walton’s methodology rests on the assumption that each model of dialogue involves specific goals which speakers are bound to pursue conjointly and thus claims that an argument is reasonable insofar as it makes a contribution to these goals. How does this pragmatic view of fallacy underpin Walton’s specific work on appeals to emotion? Walton writes:

[E]motional arguments can be used fallaciously in particular uses so that they go contrary to the proper goals of [...] dialogue that participants are supposed to be engaged in. Contrary to the common assumption that an argument based on emotion is not a rational (reasonable) argument, such an argument can be good and reasonable insofar as “good” and “rational” argument is that which contributes to the proper goals of dialogue. (1992, pp. 25–27)

The degree of reasonableness or fallaciousness of an emotional appeal depends on its fitting a particular model of dialogue and on its contribution to the latter’s goals. For example, in deliberation—one of the possible models of dialogue—, “typically, there is a decision to be made between incompatible courses of action. [...] The aim is to decide which one is the best (or preferable) one to take in the circumstances” (1997, p. 115). The arguers will resort to practical reasoning, which is directed towards a conclusion recommending a prudent course of action. According to Walton, emotional appeals are reasonable insofar as they do not impede critical questioning on the part of the respondent (1992, pp. 260–264). They are, however, deemed fallacious if they prevent the respondent from asking critical questions concerning the recommended course of action—its feasibility, its cost, its

side-effects, its alternatives and its compatibility with other goals pursued by the respondent.<sup>18</sup>

Despite being highly coherent and refined, Walton's approach remains unsatisfactory on one point: it is overly focused on the possible *effects* which emotional appeals are likely to have on the argumentative process, and not enough on the emotional appeals' inherent argumentative dimension. Walton's method tries to determine whether a given emotional appeal will have positive or negative effects, and this with regard to the ideal progression of the argumentative process which is normatively fixed by such and such "model of dialogue". If emotional appeals have the effect of contributing to the goals of the model of dialogue which speakers are supposed to be engaged in, they will be considered "reasonable". If, however, they result in violating these goals, they will be considered "fallacious". This method is coherent with Walton's declared normative stance, which seeks to evaluate the emotional appeals' merits, but its focus on their effects is to the detriment of an in-depth description of their inherent argumentative dimension.

#### 4 An Alternative Approach: Emotions as Objects of Argumentative Constructions

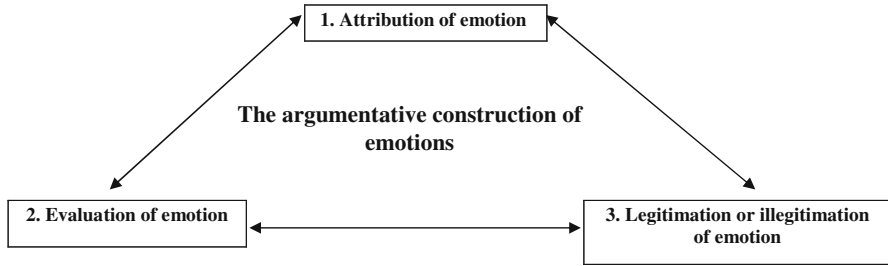
The main problem with normative approaches to emotional appeals is in my view the following: normative approaches posit the discreteness of *pathos* and *logos* and assume that they form two distinct parts of the argumentative process, which coexist more than they intertwine. This assumption leads them to discard emotional appeals when they are thought to act as illegitimate substitutes for proper argument, or to discuss their possible effects—be they negative or, sometimes, positive—on the "good" course of the argumentative process (as fixed by a "model of dialogue"). Emotional appeals are fundamentally viewed as complements which are "grafted"—to use one of Walton's terms (1997, p. 120 and 122)—onto something else which constitutes the core of argumentation (types of reasoning, argumentation schemes and the like). In what follows, I aim to challenge such assumptions and suggest that it is analytically fruitful to treat emotional appeals as *forms of argumentation* and not merely as *adjuncts to argumentation*. In order to do this, I wish to introduce a concept—namely the *argumentative construction of emotions*. This concept has the advantage of grasping two types of relationships that may occur between emotion and argumentation, and allows to contrast a "standard" and an alternative conception of *pathos*. (i) According to the "standard" conception, the construction of an emotion is called "argumentative" in the sense that it functions as an adjuvant to argumentation. The adjective "argumentative" refers to the *extrinsic finality* of the emotional appeal: in this respect, speakers appeal to emotions in order to enhance the cogency of an argumentation which seeks to establish the validity of an opinion or the opportunity of an action. (ii) According to

<sup>18</sup> According to Walton, those are the five main critical questions by means of which one can oppose a specimen of practical reasoning (1997, p. 112).

the “alternative” conception which I present here, the construction of emotion can be called “argumentative” in the sense that the emotion *itself* is the very object of argumentation. The adjective “argumentative” refers to the *intrinsic form and functioning* of the emotional appeal. In this respect, speakers argue in favor of or against an emotion: they give reasons supporting why they feel (or do not feel) this emotion and why it should (or should not) be legitimately felt. In such cases, the argumentative process bears not so much upon dispositions to believe or to act as upon dispositions to feel.

The arguability of emotions is a theme highlighted in Christian Plantin’s descriptive approach to argumentation (1997, 1998 in French, 1999, 2004 in English). Plantin does not start from the rhetorical concept of *pathos* and does not seek to emphasize that it implies that emotions possess an argumentable core (as I have attempted to do in Sect. 2). Rather, Plantin starts off with an empirical observation: in interaction, it is not at all infrequent to see speakers question the value and legitimacy of their addressee’s (or of someone else’s) emotions (2004, p. 268). These are cases one might label as *disagreements over emotions*. More precisely, we can distinguish between three varieties of disagreement. Speakers may call into question (i) an occurrent emotion, (ii) a long-term propensity to experience a specific type of emotion (what Elster calls an “emotional disposition”, 1999, p. 244) and, last but not least, (iii) an absence of emotion. Disagreements often lead to sequences in which speakers attempt to explain why they feel what they feel and, in a more normative way, why everyone should feel what they feel. Plantin claims that in such cases, speakers “*argue emotions*” (1999), so to speak: they try to establish the legitimacy of certain emotions by showing that the latter are grounded on reasons. In other words, speakers offer *argumentative constructions of their emotions*. Such a perspective, which underlines the existence of disputable emotions and which considers the possibility that the latter can be “argued” by speakers, has two main advantages. (i) It broadens the scope of the concept of argumentation. Usually, argumentative discourse is assumed to bear on specific objects and to pursue specific aims: it is thought to provide reasons for our disposition to entertain certain opinions and for our disposition to act in certain ways. Following Plantin’s hypothesis, one may point out that argumentative discourse may also provide reasons for our disposition to feel—or not to feel—certain emotions. (ii) It provides a fruitful alternative to the normative approaches examined above. As we have seen, the latter seek to determine whether an appeal to emotion is “reasonable” or “fallacious”: in this respect, they are primarily interested in the effects which an appeal to emotion is likely to produce, with regard to an idealized argumentative process. The alternative conception which I present here following Plantin does not ponder whether an appeal to emotion will have positive or negative effects in reference to an idealized argumentative process: its central claim is that emotional appeals *themselves* are argumentative and can be studied as such. What is at stake, then, is to examine how speakers *argue emotions*—that is: how speakers attempt to establish the legitimacy (or the illegitimacy) of certain emotions.

The question, now, is how to study and objectify this process in specimens of naturally-occurring argumentative discourse. This question can only be introduced here, but I would like to outline a method of analysis.



This table seeks to represent a three-step approach. The first step is to see that emotions are subject to a process which Fiehler (2002, p. 86) calls “thematization”: “In thematization, [...] an emotion is made the topic of the interaction by a verbalization”. Linguistically, thematization involves an act of reference to an emotional state: the latter is not merely “alluded to” (Besnier 1990, p. 428) by means of verbal, paraverbal or even non-verbal cues. What is fundamental is that thematization often goes hand in hand with a process of *attribution*: typically, the utterance refers to an emotional state *and* attributes it to an individual. This individual may be the speaker herself, in which case it is appropriate to speak of *self-attribution*. It can however also be the addressee or a third party: such cases pertain to *other-attribution*. For example, during French parliamentary debates on the abolition of the death penalty,<sup>19</sup> anti-abolitionist MP’s regularly say to their adversaries: “You feel pity for the culpable who undergoes his penalty”. As far as they are concerned, abolitionist MP’s evoke the “pain” and the “sorrow” felt by the victims’ families, thus attributing an emotional disposition to a third party: however, they contest that the acknowledgment of such an emotional disposition entails the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of capital punishment.

The second step leads the analyst to realize that emotions are not only attributed to individuals, they are also often *evaluated* at the same time. This dimension is not dealt with in Plantin’s model, and needs to receive attention here. Indeed, speakers rank the attributed emotions according to an axiology: they endow them with value or, on the contrary, seek to downgrade their legitimacy. For instance, when attributing a “pity for the culpable” to their abolitionist opponents, anti-abolitionist MP’s speak of an “ill-placed”, an “excessive” or a “wrong sensitivity”. Such cases pertain to what Fiehler calls “analyzing” and “calling into question” strategies:

“Analyzing” refers to strategies by which the suitability of the manifested emotion in terms of intensity or type is problematized; “Calling into question” refers to strategies by which displayed emotions are not accepted as appropriate. (2002, p. 83)

What is particularly interesting is to identify the *criteria* upon which speakers rely when they evaluate attributed emotions. Four main criteria can be distinguished.

<sup>19</sup> The following examples are taken from the corpus of my doctoral thesis: *La construction argumentative des emotions dans les débats parlementaires français sur l’abolition de la peine de mort (1791–1981)*, University of Lausanne, 2008.

First, speakers may evaluate if and how the attributed emotion fits to *the individual who is assumed to experience it* (abolitionist MP's will for example admit that it is perfectly legitimate for the victims' families to experience anger and a longing for revenge against the criminal, but claim that such emotional states are unfit for elected representatives). Secondly, they may evaluate if and how the attributed emotion fits to its *intentional object* (anti-abolitionist MP's constantly criticize a feeling of pity which is directed towards "murderers"). Thirdly, they may evaluate the attributed emotion according to the *action tendencies* it is most likely to be associated with (at the end of the eighteenth century, abolitionist MP's claimed that the "pity" which the public feels for the executed is associated with rebellious action tendencies which lead to no longer respect the law). Fourthly, emotions can be evaluated according to the normative constraints associated with the discourse genre (Walton would say the "model of dialogue") in which speakers are interacting.

The third step consists in describing how emotions may undergo a process of *legitimation* (or *illegitimation*, for that matter) on the part of speakers. Indeed, when an emotion is self- or other-attributed, it may be accompanied by a constellation of propositions which seek to confer it with legitimacy (or illegitimacy). Such propositions have speakers verbalize the type of situation which, in their view, ensures the legitimate character of the emotion. Yet speaking of "verbalization" might not be accurate enough: Elster rightfully reminds us that "sometimes, emotions are said to be triggered by events or state of affairs, [...which], strictly speaking, is misleading" (1999, p. 249). It is thus incorrect to say that types of situations determine types of emotions: in fact, it would be better to say that *types of evaluation of situations determine types of emotions*. From an argumentative perspective, this implies that speakers actively *construe* the situation so that it "argues" in favor or against the emotion in question, so to speak. What should be an interesting object of study, then, is the discursive constructs of situations and their emotional orientation. Here, I would say, following Plantin, that argumentation theory can benefit greatly from the development of cognitive approaches to emotions. As we have seen in Sect. 1, appraisal theories are of great interest, insofar as they remind us that emotions are closely related to a process of evaluation in the course of which the individual interprets events and situations according to a set of criteria. As Plantin's work suggests, the cognitive criteria of evaluation which psychologists study in great detail are useful from an argumentative discourse analyst's point of view. Indeed, they offer interesting cues for the study of the *discursive and emotionally-oriented constructs of events and situations*. For instance, an argumentative construction of indignation will usually involve the "agency" criterion (Scherer 2004, p. 141): speakers will try to show that a negative state of affairs can be described as the effect of an action (or of an omission thereof) which is itself imputable to a responsible agent (if no one can be held responsible, it becomes difficult to maintain that indignation is grounded in reason<sup>20</sup>). To take one last example from the French parliamentary debates on the abolition of the death

<sup>20</sup> In their cognitive classification of emotions, Ortony et al. argue that indignation belongs to the class of "agent-based" (or "attribution-of-responsibility") emotions (1987).



penalty, twentieth-century abolitionist MP's often use the following argumentative construction of indignation. They claim that the root cause for criminality is the suffering endured by neglected members of society, and that this suffering is itself caused by the inaction of political leaders, of the National Assembly and even of "society" as a whole. This particular construction of indignation crucially implies a *transfer of responsibility*: those who commit crimes are portrayed as suffering beings, as helpless victims of an unjust social system, while "society" is seen as the *real* agent responsible for the existence of criminality. According to abolitionist MP's, indignation is justified, as the responsibility for criminality is not assigned properly: it is concentrated on individuals who, in fact, have but a small part of it (see Micheli 2008 for a more detailed analysis).

## 5 Concluding Remarks

The insistence on the arguability of emotions invites us to relativize the dichotomy between *logos* and *pathos*. In his recently published *Traité de Rhétorique Antilogique*, Marc Angenot makes a strikingly similar point, without, however, developing it further:

Ce qui crée problème dans la plupart des traités classiques, ce n'est pas la présentation de la rhétorique comme technique complémentaire du *logos* et du *pathos*, c'est la banale disjonction *pathos/logos*. Cette disjonction est scolaire. Les plus subtils des rhéteurs voient bien que les deux, non pas se côtoient, mais se confondent, et *qu'il faudrait analyser en bloc [...] une logique des sentiments ou plutôt, plusieurs logiques affectives*. (2008, p. 63, my emphasis)

My aim, in this paper, was to show the analytical limitations raised when one considers that there are, on the one hand, "pure" argument schemes which form the core of reasoning and, on the other, emotional appeals which merely help to enhance the latter's persuasive effectiveness. One might be tempted to take up one of Angenot's (2008, p. 256) expressions and claim that it is possible to view *pathos* as being "within the *logos*". I have tried to address the relationship between emotion and argumentation without discarding emotional appeals as illegitimate substitutes for proper argument and without attempting to evaluate their degree of reasonableness by gauging their effects on the "good" course of the argumentative process. Emotions can be seen as objects of argumentative constructions, I have argued, which calls for the study of three main discursive operations: the attribution of emotions, their evaluation and their legitimation by speakers. As the French sociologist Boudon (1994, p. 45) once wrote: «Comprendre l'émergence d'un sentiment moral, c'est le plus souvent reconstruire le système de raisons qui le fonde». Thus, a reconstruction of the reasons which speakers give for or against particular emotions and an empirical description of the diverging "affective logics" which are found in interaction could be promising avenues for argumentation studies.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> I wish to thank Galia Yanoshevski and Gregory Wicky for kindly checking my English.

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