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SENSIBLE REASON IN ARGUMENTATION: BEYOND THE EMOTION/REASON DIVIDE

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This article introduces the concept of sensible reason in order to explain a dimension of argumentation that is often treated too broadly under the category of emotion. The central claim is that certain affective, perceptual, symbolic, and situated elements do more than accompany arguments as persuasive intensifiers: they function within argumentation as part of what gives claims meaning, force, orientation, and justification. For that reason, the term sensible reason is proposed as a more precise way of accounting for how the sensible operates within argumentative practice. The article clarifies what this concept means by arguing that sensible reason is not reducible to explicit emotion-language, propositional form, or rhetorical ornament, but must be understood through its symbolic expression, its cultural and collective constitution, its situational character, and its role in the production of argumentative intelligibility. From this perspective, argumentation appears not simply as an inferential structure, but as a social and situated practice in which sensible forms participate in what arguments do. The case of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) and its political formulation of digna rabia (“dignified rage”) is used to show how a sensible reason may become historically mediated, multimodal, collective, and publicly operative within political argumentation.

Keywords: sensible reason, argumentation, emotion, collective affectivity, situated reasoning

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Introduction: emotion, argumentation, and the need for sensible reason

In argumentation theory, emotion has long occupied an ambiguous place. On the one hand, rhetoric has always recognized its persuasive force. On the other hand, rationalist traditions have often treated it as secondary, distorting, or external to proper reasoning. More recent work has complicated this picture by insisting that emotion belongs to argumentative practice itself. Michael Gilbert's contribution is decisive here because he treats emotion as a mode of argumentation rather than as an obstacle to rational exchange. In doing so, he shows that arguments are not exhausted by the critical-logical model and that actual argumentative practice includes emotional, visceral, and other non-strictly propositional forms of reasoning (Gilbert, 1997; 2014). This was a crucial shift because it challenged the assumption that only formally articulated reasons count as argumentative reasons and opened argumentation theory to dimensions of human exchange that had too often been relegated to the margins.

Yet this recognition does not fully solve the problem. Even when emotion is admitted as part of argumentation, it often remains undertheorized. It is still unclear how to identify it, how to understand it, and how to distinguish it from a purely subjective reaction. The problem becomes sharper when emotion functions not only as an adornment or distraction, but as part of the force through which something becomes intelligible, supportable, and justified within an argument. In such cases, what is at issue is no longer simply whether emotion is present, but whether it can count as reason. Current approaches can acknowledge emotional meaning, but they do not yet adequately explain how emotion intervenes in arguments and discussions when it shapes judgment, supports claims, and contributes to the intelligibility of what is being argued (Morales Vidales, 2024).

This difficulty is not incidental. It points to a deeper conceptual problem in the way emotion has often been approached. One of the persistent limitations of many theories is that they continue to interpret emotion from a rationalist framework that treats feeling and thought as separable domains. Within such a framework, emotion appears either as a disturbance to reasoning or as something that must be translated into rational terms in order to become epistemically acceptable. But this translation is already part of the problem. If what is felt is not external to what is thought (Fernández

Christlieb, 2023), then emotion cannot be treated simply as an additional layer attached to reasoning from the outside. Rather, emotions are intertwined with cognition, culture, symbolism, and judgment; they are part of the way the world becomes meaningful in argumentation.

For that reason, the category of emotion may be too broad and too indeterminate for the work argumentation theory needs it to do. To say that emotion is present in argumentation is already an important step, but it does not yet explain what emotion is doing when it functions as part of meaning, part of support, and part of the way a situation becomes argumentatively intelligible. It points to a real phenomenon, but it does not yet provide a sufficiently precise concept for its argumentative role. The question, then, is not whether emotions are present in argumentation. They clearly are. The more difficult question is how to understand those affective, perceptual, and symbolic elements when they are not external to a claim, but help give it force, orientation, and justificatory weight. From this perspective, argumentation appears as a social and situated practice in which sensible forms contribute to the constitution of argumentative meaning. In this respect, the present proposal is also compatible with anthropological approaches to argumentation that emphasize its rootedness in human practices, forms of life, and culturally situated modes of understanding (Tindale, 2021).

This article argues that what argumentation theory commonly names “emotion” should, in many cases, be redescribed as sensible reason. Sensible reason names a form of knowledge and justification that operates through affective, perceptual, symbolic, cultural and situated configurations. It may be expressible in a premise, but it is not exhausted by propositional form. Its force also depends on how what is felt and what is thought are articulated in a concrete argumentative situation. In this sense, sensible reasons cannot be reduced to subjective states; they are ways in which meaning, relevance, and support become available within argumentation. The concept is proposed in order to account more precisely for how the sensible functions when it becomes part of what is argued, part of what sustains a claim, and part of what allows that claim to appear meaningful within a shared world (Morales Vidales, 2024).

This article is a theoretical-conceptual analysis. Its aim is not to conduct an empirical study of the EZLN or to offer a comprehensive historical reconstruction of the movement. Rather, it reconstructs and synthesizes selected positions in argumentation theory, aesthetics, and social psychology in order to develop the concept of sensible reason. The EZLN case serves

an illustrative function: it shows how sensible reason may become visible within a concrete political argument, but it is not treated here as an empirical corpus or as a full case study.

On this basis, the article first examines the limitations of the category of emotion in argumentation theory, then develops the concept of sensible reason through aesthetic and social-psychological frameworks and finally turns to the EZLN's *digna rabia* ("dignified rage") as an illustrative case of how sensible reason may operate in political argumentation.

Why emotion is an insufficient category: Gilbert and the couple example

Gilbert's contribution is essential because he blocks the assumption that emotions are simply irrational intrusions or persuasive embellishments. One of the most suggestive examples he gives, and which has been discussed elsewhere, is the exchange between Laird and Shazia after a dinner party. Laird cannot understand why Olivia was so upset "just because Jude forgot to take the ice cream out of the freezer," while Shazia immediately perceives that Olivia's distress had nothing to do with the ice cream itself. Gilbert's point is that arguing well requires the kind of attunement Shazia displays: an ability to perceive what is at stake beneath the surface of the exchange (Gilbert, 2014). What matters here is not only that emotions are present, but that emotional understanding provides a kind of knowledge about what the disagreement is really about.

This example is crucial because it clarifies one of Gilbert's strongest insights: emotion is not simply an added reaction to an argument, but part of the knowledge through which the argumentative situation becomes intelligible. Shazia understands something that Laird does not, not because she has more formal information, but because she is attuned to the lived and emotional reality of the situation. In this sense, Gilbert (2014) shows that there is an important form of knowledge operating in argumentation that cannot be captured solely by propositional reconstruction.

Gilbert's example is particularly valuable for the present article because it shows that context and emotional understanding are indispensable to argumentation. It brings into view a form of knowledge that cannot be fully captured through propositional reconstruction alone and establishes that what is affective in argumentation is already part of how meaning is grasped. Building on this insight, the present article goes further by asking how such

affective understanding takes form, how it becomes socially intelligible, and how it may be understood as part of a broader sensible logic within argumentative practice. It is at this point that Pablo Fernández Christlieb (2023) becomes especially important for the framework developed here.

Justifying sensible reason

One of the persistent difficulties in theories of emotion is the way they reproduce a division between the rational and the irrational, or, more specifically, between thinking and feeling. A similar division appears in accounts that separate the body from thought, as though these were self-sufficient entities that could be adequately understood in isolation. The epistemological starting point of this paper is that such distinctions are conceptually useful but phenomenologically misleading. Thought, feeling, and body do not occur as separate realities in lived experience. They occur together, as part of a single process through which human beings sense, interpret, and inhabit the world. Thinking and feeling are intertwined, and the division between them is largely the result of theoretical reflection rather than a primary feature of experience (Fernández Christlieb, 2004).

This matters because the usual separation between feeling and thinking does not adequately explain what happens when human beings actually feel. Whether what arrives is bodily pain, fear, sadness, excitement, reflection, or the impact of an external stimulus, what is sensed is already being processed and interpreted. Perception is not a mute raw datum followed later by thought; rather, what is felt becomes intelligible through an immediate interpretive movement. In this sense, the distinction between sensing and thinking quickly becomes unstable. Sensible knowledge is not a peripheral addition to cognition but a foundational element in the way reality is perceived and understood (Morales Vidales, 2024).

Fernández's broader aesthetic psychology supports this claim by rejecting the dualisms that have structured much modern thought. In *Psicología estética de la situación social* [*Aesthetic Psychology of the Social Situation*], Fernández Christlieb argues that an aesthetic approach to society refuses to separate the physical from the psychic, or the individual from the social. The aesthetic, in his sense, is not simply art or beauty; it is form, and it is also a non-discursive mode of knowledge. It is "a way of thinking that has to be felt," which means that knowledge is not always external, detached, and verbalized, but can also be affective, implicated, and interior to the world

it knows (Fernández Christlieb, 2023). That framework is important here because it gives philosophical and social-psychological support to the claim that thinking and feeling are not two detachable layers of human activity, but intertwined aspects of one sensible process.

Once this is recognized, the problem with the category of emotion becomes clearer. To name something an emotion may suggest that it is a discrete and identifiable inner state. But this is often too narrow. There are many instances in which the sensible force of an argument cannot be reduced to the name of an emotion. Feeling may be explicit in expressions such as “it hurts” or “I feel sad,” but it can also be almost imperceptible while still shaping the argument’s force. In political or scientific argument, emotion may not be named at all and yet still play a crucial role in interaction with culture, thought, and situation. Walton’s example of terms such as “war” is useful here: the word does not name an emotion, yet it carries a powerful sensible and affective charge that can orient judgment and response (Walton & Macagno, 2014).

For that reason, the phenomenon at issue cannot be reduced to “emotion” or to an “emotional mode” of argument alone. What is at stake is the fact that feeling and thought are often given together in lived forms. The conceptual separation between them may be useful for analysis, but it becomes strained when one returns to actual human life. There are cultural moments in which this is especially visible. The Baroque is one such moment: it configures cultural forms in which thought and feeling are not separated but experienced together through the mutual articulation of art and science. Its spaces, images, and sensibilities do not distribute reflection on one side and feeling on the other; they hold them together in a single experience (Fernández Christlieb, 2004).

In much of the literature, emotion appears as something that either precedes thought as a bodily impulse or follows it as a subjective accompaniment. But this is already the wrong model. If what is felt and what is thought occur together, then the task is not to add emotion to an otherwise rational process, but to understand that some reasons are themselves sensible (Morales Vidales, 2024).

From this perspective, the category of emotion becomes too narrow for the phenomenon at issue. To call something an emotion often suggests that it is an identifiable inner state. But what is felt is not exhausted by named emotions such as fear, sadness, or anger. The sensible can also be diffuse, atmospheric, collective, and difficult to name. This is one reason

why Fernández's (2000) account of collective affectivity is so important. His framework rejects the reduction of emotion to a private interior event and instead situates affect in culture, form, and shared life. For this reason, what is felt is not only individual but social; it is shaped by history, symbols, atmosphere, and collective ways of sensing and making sense.

The justification of sensible reason therefore depends on recognizing that the sensible is not an irrational residue. On the contrary, it has its own logic, one that can provide coherence and reasonableness to arguments. Sensible knowledge enriches reasonableness and support in argumentation, and sensible reasons emerge as the basis of what is presented as knowledge and as the foundation of the claims being advanced (Morales Vidales, 2024). This means that sensible reason is not proposed as a metaphor or as a poetic supplement to argumentation theory. It is proposed as a theoretical concept that captures a real dimension of argumentative practice: the dimension in which feeling participates in the formation of meaning, support, and judgment, rather than remaining at the level of expression alone.

As Fernández Christlieb (2000) suggests, the logic of emotion is not the same as the rational logic by which it is usually judged. The logic of the emotional is sensible, and for that reason it must be approached through a different frame of intelligibility. This is the point at which aesthetics becomes decisive. The justification of sensible reason cannot rest only on a critique of rationalist dualisms; it also requires a positive epistemological framework capable of explaining how the sensible knows. That is the function of aesthetics in this article. Aesthetics is understood here in its broader epistemological sense: not only as a philosophy of art, but as a theory of sensible knowledge (Baumgarten, 1936).

From this perspective, Alexander Baumgarten's formulation of aesthetics as the science of sensible knowledge becomes foundational, since it makes room for forms of apprehension that are neither fully discursive nor fully reducible to clear and distinct concepts, yet still count as knowledge.

What this concept allows, therefore, is not a sentimentalization of argument, but a more adequate account of argumentative knowledge. Sensible reason names a form of rationality that is not opposed to feeling because it is already shaped by the intertwining of feeling and thought. It names a mode of understanding in which experience, perception, symbolism, and affective life are not irrational leftovers but constitutive elements of how reasons are lived and advanced (Morales Vidales, 2024).

Fernández Christlieb and the social-aesthetic logic of sensible reason

Fernández Christlieb's contribution is especially important to this article for at least two reasons. First, he conceives affectivity from a point of view that allows emotion to be understood not as an irrational remainder measured against the standards of formal rationality, but as a phenomenon that follows a different logic from the one usually associated with rational thought. This is fundamental because it opens the possibility of understanding the sensible not as a deficiency of reason, but as a mode of intelligibility with its own order. For Fernández, this order is best understood through an aesthetic framework. Yet aesthetics is not understood here in a narrow sense, as a matter of beauty, artistic taste, or expressive surface. What is at stake is a broader aesthetic logic through which reality is felt, apprehended, and given form. From this perspective, the sensible is not opposed to meaning; it is one of the ways in which meaning is constituted (Fernández Christlieb, 2000).

Second, Fernández's framework is not only aesthetic, but social aesthetic. Affectivity does not exist in abstraction from the world; it exists within a cultural horizon that gives it intelligibility, form, content, and structure. What is felt is shaped by collective life, by historically sedimented meanings, by symbolic environments, and by shared ways of sensing and interpreting reality. In that sense, affectivity is not simply an interior event; it is socially formed and socially legible. This point is decisive because it allows a move from collective affectivity to argumentation. If affective life is culturally structured and situated, then the sensible dimension of argumentation must also be understood as socially constituted (Fernández Christlieb, 2023).

Once these two dimensions are brought together, Fernández opens an important path for recognizing affectivity and for understanding its significance within argumentation theory. On the one hand, he shows that the sensible operates according to a logic different from the rationalist one that has often governed theoretical accounts of emotion. On the other hand, he shows that this sensible logic is inseparable from culture, situation, and collective life. Transposed into argumentation, this means that what is often called emotion is better understood not as an individual reaction or rhetorical intensifier, but as part of a socially situated sensible logic through which reality is interpreted and argued. This, in turn, makes it possible to understand argumentation itself as a social product: not a static arrangement of propositions, but a practice in constant transformation that must

always be understood from its particular situation. In this respect, Fernández enriches the study of affectivity by providing a framework through which sensible reason can be theorized as part of argumentation itself (Fernández Christlieb, 2023).

This is also what allows the present article to move beyond Gilbert without abandoning him. Gilbert (1997) shows that emotional awareness is indispensable for understanding many argumentative exchanges. Fernández (2000) makes it possible to explain why this knowledge cannot be reduced to interpersonal feeling. It belongs to a broader sensible logic through which reality is socially formed, perceived, and made meaningful. Gilbert opens the argumentative space for emotion; Fernández provides the conceptual framework to understand its form, its logic, and its social intelligibility. The notion of sensible reason emerges precisely at this intersection.

The dimensions of sensible reason

The preceding sections have established the conceptual grounds for sensible reason. This section now gathers those elements into a set of analytical dimensions, in order to clarify how sensible reason can be identified within argumentative practice.

At this point, it is possible to recapitulate the theoretical framework developed so far and to clarify more precisely what is meant here by sensible reason in argumentation. The preceding discussion has shown that the problem cannot be reduced to whether emotions are present in argumentative practice. That much is already clear. The deeper issue is how the affective, the emotive, and the sensible operate when they belong to the argumentative process itself, helping to give an argument meaning, force, orientation, and support. For that reason, the concept of sensible reason is proposed not as a simple substitute for the word emotion, but as a more precise way of accounting for the argumentative functioning of the sensible. The issue is not only that affective elements are present in argumentative practice, but that they may participate in what gives an argument meaning, orientation, support, and justificatory force.

Several conclusions follow from the theoretical discussion. First, sensible reason should not be understood as a fixed type of emotion. What matters is not whether what appears in argumentation is already stabilized as fear, grief, anger, or indignation, but whether what is felt is functioning within the argument as part of what reveals, frames, or sustains what is at stake.

The sensible may appear in raw, diffuse, intense, explicit, or only partially elaborated forms; what is decisive is its argumentative operation. In this sense, sensible reason refers less to an emotional category than to the way the sensible becomes active within argumentative practice.

Second, sensible reason emerges from the intertwining of feeling, thought, and embodied life. It cannot be understood from models that sharply separate cognition from affect or reason from bodily experience. What is felt is not external to what is thought, and what is thought is not detached from sensible life. Rather, argumentation unfolds within a human process in which sensing, interpreting, remembering, and judging occur together. This is why sensible reason does not name an irrational interruption of reasoning, but one of the ways in which reasoning itself takes place in lived practice.

Third, sensible reason becomes intelligible through symbolic form. The sensible is not given only as an interior state, but through language, gesture, image, atmosphere, scene, rhythm, tonality, and other symbolic articulations by means of which experience acquires public legibility. This is one of the reasons why an aesthetic frame is necessary. If sensible reason is to be understood adequately, it cannot be read only through a rationalist model focused on explicit propositions. It must also be approached through a framework capable of making sense of the forms in which the sensible appears, organizes meaning, and becomes communicable. In this article, that framework is aesthetic, understood not as a theory of artistic taste, but as an epistemology of sensible knowledge.

Fourth, sensible reason is social, cultural, and collective. What is felt does not emerge in abstraction from the world, nor does it remain enclosed within a purely private interiority. Affectivity is shaped by shared meanings, historical memory, symbolic environments, and collective ways of sensing and interpreting reality. For that reason, sensible reason must be understood as socially formed and socially legible. This also means that argumentation itself cannot be reduced to an abstract logical structure. It must be approached as a social product whose force depends in part on the worlds of meaning in which it arises.

Fifth, sensible reason is situational. Neither affectivity nor argumentation exists outside the concrete situations in which they emerge. What counts as relevant, urgent, harmful, dignified, threatening, or hopeful is always configured within a particular sociohistorical and political world. The sensible therefore cannot be understood apart from the situation in which it appears. To identify a sensible reason is not simply to name a feeling or a symbol, but to understand the specific world of relations, memories,

tensions, and urgencies through which that sensible configuration becomes meaningful in argumentation. This broader understanding of sensible reason also resonates with anthropological approaches to argumentation. If arguments arise within shared worlds of meaning, historical memory, symbolic environments, and concrete human situations, then argumentation itself cannot be reduced to an abstract exchange of propositions. It must also be approached as a human practice rooted in culture, embodiment, and forms of life. In this sense, the notion of sensible reason complements Tindale's anthropological perspective by showing that what makes an argument intelligible within a human world is not only inferential structure, but also the sensible forms through which that world is perceived, valued, and inhabited (Tindale, 2021).

Finally, sensible reason may function as support, orientation, and justification within argumentation, even when it is not fully reducible to an explicit premise. This does not mean that the sensible replaces argumentative articulation, but that it participates in making that articulation possible and meaningful. It may shape what is recognized as the central issue, disclose what is at stake, give force to a claim, or support a conclusion by making a situation intelligible in a particular way. In this sense, sensible reason is not external to argumentation, but constitutive of the way arguments are lived, grasped, and sustained within human forms of life.

Taken together, these conclusions make it possible to understand sensible reason as a mode of argumentative intelligibility in which affective, perceptual, symbolic, social, and situational dimensions are articulated within the production of meaning and support.

Sensible reason as argumentative support

Once these dimensions have been clarified, the next question is how sensible reason functions argumentatively. The issue is not only what sensible reason is, but how it can operate as support, orientation, and justification within a concrete argumentative situation.

If this article is to make a contribution to argumentation theory, the central task is to clarify what sensible reason is and how it functions within argumentation. The problem begins with a conceptual limitation that has persisted even in approaches that recognize emotion as part of argumentative practice: emotion is often acknowledged, yet its argumentative operation remains insufficiently explained. The issue is not simply the presence

of affect, but the possibility that what is felt may participate in the production of meaning, support, and justification.

In more formal or structurally oriented approaches, argumentation has often been analyzed primarily through the relations among claims, premises, conclusions, inference patterns, schemes, or dialectical procedures. This is visible, for example, in pragma-dialectical approaches to argumentative discussion, as well as in work on argumentation schemes and critical questions (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004; Walton et al., 2008). Hubert Marraud's account is useful here because it shifts the emphasis toward reasons as considerations advanced for or against a position within a concrete argumentative situation. Argumentation, in this view, is a practice in which reasons are examined, accepted, rejected, or weighed in relation to what is being argued (Marraud, 2022).

This point is important here because it allows movement beyond a purely formal conception of argument without abandoning the category of reason. The present proposal extends this insight by arguing that some reasons operate in a sensible, affective, symbolic, and situated register, and should therefore be treated as constitutive of argumentation itself.

An argument cannot be reduced to a set of inferentially ordered propositions alone (Marraud, 2022). It is also a way of presenting a world, of organizing what counts as harm, dignity, threat, responsibility, or urgency, and of orienting judgment within a concrete situation. In this broader sense, argumentation is not only a logical operation but a situated practice of meaning-making. The sensible is therefore not an external addition to argumentative reason. It is one of the ways in which argumentative sense is constituted. This point becomes even clearer when argumentation is approached anthropologically. From that perspective, arguments are not only formal structures, but human acts embedded in practices, relations, audiences, and ways of life. The notion of sensible reason extends this view by showing that the sensible is one of the dimensions through which such practices become meaningful and persuasive within lived situations (Tindale, 2021).

This is why the category of sensible reason is necessary. The term emotion often remains too broad or too ambiguous: it names something real, but it does not yet explain how that reality becomes argumentative. By contrast, sensible reason refers to those cases in which affective life is not merely felt but organized into a form that can support a claim, disclose a situation, and orient a conclusion. It names the point at which feeling and thought are no longer treated as separate domains, but as intertwined dimensions of argumentative intelligibility (Morales Vidales, 2024).

The contribution of this article, then, is not to replace existing theories of argumentation, but to expand them. Sensible reason offers a concept for understanding a dimension of argumentative practice that has often been recognized but insufficiently theorized. It clarifies how feeling can function within argumentation not as irrational residue, but as a form of knowledge and justification articulated with thought. To speak of sensible reason is therefore to name a mode of argumentation in which the sensible is neither opposed to reason nor reducible to rhetoric, but constitutive of the way arguments become intelligible and forceful in lived practice.

Having established sensible reason as a situated form of argumentative intelligibility, the article now turns to the EZLN's *digna rabia* ("dignified rage"). The purpose of this section is illustrative rather than empirical: it shows how a sensible reason may become visible in political argumentation through memory, symbolism, collective affectivity, and political orientation.

***Digna rabia* ("dignified rage") as a sensible reason in Zapatista argumentation**

The EZLN offers one of the clearest cases for understanding why sensible reason is needed as a theoretical concept in argumentation. *Digna rabia* should not be read as an emotional outburst attached to political discourse or as an intensifier of an already established claim. It is better understood as a sensible configuration through which pain, historical memory, dignity, resistance, and collective hope become part of the very force of the argument. In this sense, *digna rabia* is not only something the Zapatistas feel; it is also something through which they interpret their condition, name injustice, and justify struggle (Marcos, 2011). It therefore functions as a sensible reason within political argumentation. Through *digna rabia*, what is affective in the movement becomes intelligible as support, orientation, and justification—precisely the kind of argumentative operation that the concept of sensible reason is meant to explain.

One of the central operations of Zapatista discourse is the resignification of rage. Within rationalist or moralizing frameworks, rage tends to be treated as excess, loss of control, or destructive irrationality. In the EZLN, however, rage is not denied, softened, or purified into harmless sentiment. It is reworked into an ethical and political force. *Digna rabia* is not blind revenge; nor is it gratuitous violence. It is rage that does not forget tenderness, that does not abandon the possibility of justice, and that remains tied to the struggle for a different world. Through this transformation, rage is no longer

a disqualifying label; it becomes a principle of orientation for organization, resistance, and survival against oppression. It becomes a foundational argument in the construction of Zapatista political discourse: a sensible reason that gives evidence of mistreatment and pain while reorganizing them into a dignified and collective practice of resistance (Morales Vidales, 2024).

This is why *digna rabia* should be read as a sensible reason: it does not simply express emotion, but gives political form to pain, dignity, and resistance. It is sensible because it is lived, affective, embodied, and collective. But it is also a reason because it accounts for the reality being argued. It names pain, but it also interprets pain. It names injustice, but it also turns injustice into an intelligible basis for struggle. In the Zapatista context, rage becomes evidence of humiliation, dispossession, exclusion, and structural violence. It is not simply added to a political claim from the outside; it participates in making that claim intelligible and supportable. The EZLN appeals to a sensible reason through which rage becomes intelligible as a reason for struggle rather than as a symptom of grievance (Morales Vidales, 2024).

The force of *digna rabia*, however, does not reside only in textual or conceptual articulation. One of the strongest aspects of the Zapatista case is that this sensible reason also appears as a symbolic and multimodal form. It is carried not only by communiqués and speeches, but by stories, songs, murals, slogans, public appearances, and a recurring visual grammar that has become immediately recognizable. The covered face, the *pasamontañas*, the paliacate, the masked commanders, the women with braids and covered faces, the children in community spaces, the repeated scenes of collective life in Chiapas, and the persistence of certain images in murals and visual culture all operate as more than illustrations. They are symbolic forms through which dignity, rebellion, anonymity, and collective struggle become visible. In this sense, the EZLN does not simply “talk about” dignity or rage; it gives them form. The sensible reason is distributed across discourse, image, rhythm, and scene (Morales Vidales, 2024).

This symbolic density is crucial. Zapatistas’ use of symbolism and allegory is not ornamental; it is part of the persuasive and mobilizing power of the movement. Figures such as Old Antonio¹, recurrent symbols such

¹ The EZLN, or Zapatista Army of National Liberation, is an Indigenous and anti-capitalist movement that emerged publicly in Chiapas, Mexico, in 1994. Its political discourse combines communiqués, stories, autonomous community organization, and a rich symbolic vocabulary. Old Antonio is a fictional Indigenous elder in Subcomandante Marcos’s stories who functions as a figure of memory, communal wisdom, and Indigenous knowledge within this discourse.

as water, the sword, the tree, and the stone, and the visual presence of the balaclava all contribute to a sensible knowledge that is simple in appearance but powerful in effect. The covered face is especially important because it condenses several meanings at once: protection, anonymity, collectivity, and the idea that the Zapatistas are not fighting for personal glory but for justice and dignity for all. In paintings, images, slogans, and public appearances, the covered face alone can evoke Zapatismo “in all its essence.” This matters for the present paper because it shows that sensible reason may be embodied in symbols that carry a whole argumentative world without being reducible to a single proposition.

The murals and visual scenes of Zapatista communities deepen this point even further. The presence of children in schools, rainbows, jungle landscapes, Indigenous roots, community coexistence, and images of women, boys, and masked figures do not merely “represent” the movement; they help build the sensible world through which the movement argues. They present an organic relation between community, territory, memory, future, and dignity. What is being argued is not only opposition to oppression, but the possibility of another life: communal, rooted, autonomous, and dignified. In this sense, *digna rabia* is not exhausted by a slogan. It becomes part of a sensible atmosphere and a world-image that can be seen, heard, and felt. An aesthetic frame of understanding is therefore necessary: only by attending to form can one explain how these images, narratives, and tonalities become publicly intelligible as reasons, rather than being reduced to emotive decoration (Morales Vidales, 2024).

The historical and collective dimensions of *digna rabia* are equally decisive. This sensible reason does not arise as an isolated response to a single event. It is historically mediated by the *longue durée* of colonization, Indigenous dispossession, humiliation, exclusion, and state violence. Zapatista discourse repeatedly situates pain, memory, and resistance within a temporal continuity that links past suffering, present struggle, and the possibility of a dignified future. Memory exceeds recollection; it operates as an active political force. It keeps alive the names of the dead, the trauma of conquest, the continuity of oppression, and the dignity of those who resist. In that sense, *digna rabia* condenses not only present indignation but also a collective memory that legitimizes current resistance and projects it toward the future (Marcos, 2011).

This historical mediation also shows why *digna rabia* is not simply reactive. It is reconstructive. It gathers grievances, pain, and accumulated rage, but it does so in a way that refuses both resignation and nihilistic destruction.

It transforms suffering into a principle of struggle, and struggle into a way of preserving dignity. It is therefore not only a protest against injustice, but also an affirmative reconstruction of political life. *Digna rabia* is described as an ethical construct and as a force that channels anger constructively toward organization, autonomy, and social transformation. The important point for the paper is that this makes *digna rabia* not simply an object of feeling, but a reasoned, situated, and morally intelligible basis for argument and action (Morales Vidales, 2024).

The case is also powerful because *digna rabia* is publicly operative. It works inside the movement, helping organize communities, sustain resistance, and orient political action, but it does not remain internal to the EZLN. It is capable of travelling across audiences, struggles, and borders. The symbolism of Zapatista argumentation transcends language and cultural barriers, reaching global audiences and creating emotional and political resonance beyond the immediate Mexican context. In this sense, *digna rabia* becomes a publicly shareable sensible reason: it can be re-used, re-symbolized, and recognized by other anti-systemic or resistance movements as a way of naming the passage from pain to organized struggle. That portability matters because it shows that sensible reasons are not confined to private or local feelings; they may become publicly legible forms of political understanding (Morales Vidales, 2024).

Seen in this light, *digna rabia* shows why the category of emotion is too weak for certain argumentative phenomena. If described only as emotion, it risks being treated as an affective accompaniment to a more properly rational discourse. But that misses its role in the argument. *Digna rabia* is not simply added to a political claim; it is part of what makes that claim intelligible, forceful, and publicly meaningful. It is symbolic, situated, collective, historically mediated, multimodal, and publicly operative. It condenses a world of lived injustice, collective memory, ethical orientation, and resistance into a form that can orient judgment and sustain a movement. For that reason, the EZLN case does more than illustrate the concept developed in this article; it demonstrates how sensible reasons can be identified, how they function, and how they become constitutive of argumentation itself.

Conclusion

This article has argued that what argumentation theory often names under the broad category of emotion may, in many cases, be better understood as sensible reason. The purpose of this concept is not to rename emotion, but

to explain how affective, perceptual, symbolic, social, and situated forms may participate in the production of argumentative meaning, support, orientation, and justificatory force. Sensible reason therefore names a dimension of argumentation in which what is felt is not external to reasoning, but part of the way arguments become intelligible and forceful within concrete forms of life.

The argument developed throughout this article has shown that sensible reason must be understood through several interconnected dimensions. It does not refer to a fixed type of emotion, but to the argumentative functioning of the sensible. It emerges through the intertwining of feeling, thought, and embodied life; it becomes intelligible through symbolic forms; it requires an aesthetic frame of understanding; it is culturally shaped, socially constituted, and collectively legible; and it must be read from the particular situation in which it appears. It may emerge explicitly or implicitly, not only in verbalized emotions, but also in images, tones, scenes, memories, gestures, and atmospheres that organize what is at stake in the argument. In this sense, sensible reason allows us to understand that what is affective in argumentation is not only present, but active: it is doing something in the argument and in the argumentative situation.

The paper has also shown that the category of emotion is insufficient when the task is no longer to acknowledge affective presence, but to explain how the sensible functions as part of argumentative meaning and support. Gilbert's work remains indispensable because it opens the argumentative space in which the affective can be recognized as relevant knowledge. Yet the argument advanced here has also suggested that this recognition is not enough by itself. A broader conceptual frame is needed in order to explain how affective experience becomes intelligible as part of argumentation and how its force is shaped by form, culture, history, and situation. This is why the aesthetic and social-psychological framework developed through Fernández Christlieb becomes so important: it makes it possible to understand the sensible not as an irrational interruption of reasoning, but as a mode of intelligibility through which the world is apprehended, configured, and argued.

The EZLN's *digna rabia* ("dignified rage") has served here as an illustrative case of this argumentative operation. It shows how rage, when articulated with dignity, memory, symbolism, and collective resistance, can become more than an affective response: it can function as a sensible reason. In this case, the sensible does not simply accompany political discourse; it helps organize what counts as injury, dignity, responsibility, and struggle.

On this basis, I argue that argumentation must be understood more explicitly as a social and situated practice. Arguments do not emerge

in abstraction from lived reality, but within historical, cultural, symbolic, and affective worlds that shape what counts as a reason and how a claim acquires force. From this perspective, sensible reason helps account for a dimension of argumentative practice that has often been recognized in experience but insufficiently conceptualized in theory: the dimension in which affective, perceptual, symbolic, social, and historical forms participate in the production of argumentative meaning. To recognize sensible reason is therefore to recognize that argumentation is not only a matter of inferential structure, but also a matter of how worlds are disclosed, how situations become intelligible, and how claims are sustained within human forms of life. In this respect, the concept of sensible reason also converges with anthropological approaches to argumentation that understand arguing as a human, cultural, and situated practice rather than as a purely formal exercise. What sensible reason adds to this view is a more explicit account of the affective, perceptual, and symbolic dimensions through which arguments become intelligible within shared worlds (Tindale, 2021).

The contribution of sensible reason is therefore not to displace existing approaches in argumentation theory, but to widen their field of intelligibility. It brings into view a dimension of arguing in which feeling, symbolization, memory, perception, and collective experience participate in the constitution of meaning, force, and support. To take this dimension seriously is to recognize that human beings do not argue only through propositions or inferential structures, but also through the sensible forms by which they know, signify, endure, resist, and imagine possible worlds.

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