

MICHAEL A. GILBERT¹



A MEMOIR ON EMOTION

I was born into emotion. By this I mean that by dint of my culture, geography, and religion I found myself in a milieu which was invariably charged with emotions and emotional expression. I was born a very long time ago in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, New York. The population was largely Jewish, a very emotional culture, and those who weren't were mostly Italian or Irish, also cultures where emotional expression was natural and pervasive. If you have ever seen a Woody Allen film, especially *Annie Hall* where there are cutaways between mid-western Thanksgiving dinner and Jewish one, you'll have an idea of what I am referring to. Allowing for a good deal of comedic exaggeration, nay, hyperbole, the difference is based on reality.

Arguing, in the Jewish tradition went without saying. Theses, beliefs and credences were held seriously. To not question someone's statements was rude – a sign of disrespect, an indication that you did not take the other person seriously, did not think they were worth arguing with. The beliefs one put forward were not mere empty statements, they were parts of one's self, and as such could not be let go easily. As a result, all attacks or criticisms addressed to one's partner are in reality attacks on that person. No wonder emotion was so prevalent.

All of this was exacerbated by my being a philosopher. In philosophy, being able to argue well was a coveted distinction. Right or wrong you wanted to be seen as clever, sharp, witty, and, especially in those days, the heyday of analytic philosophy, ruthless. The highest compliment paid was for someone to be referred to as "bright." The world was Popperian, and the best theory was the last one standing. You attacked hard and fiercely

¹ Professor Emeritus, Department of Philosophy, York University, gilbert@yorku.ca

and took no prisoners. I remember more than once sitting in the dining hall of what was then Hunter College in the Bronx arguing with someone and someone else would come by and say, “You know he’s a philosophy major, right?” That would usually end the discussion.

Emotion, then, was second nature to me. If you cared about a belief, then you *felt something about it*. You were connected to it; it was part of you and giving it up was no simple matter. Moreover, emotive expressions such as raised voices, glares, hand gestures were taken as a matter of course and not considered insults. When the argument was over, it was over, done, and no hard feelings. This was how I was conditioned as a New Yorker and especially as a New York Jew. All this was just natural.

Then I moved to Canada.

Talk about culture shock. Most people think of Canada as a colder and more polite U.S., and to some small extent that might be true. But for this New Yorker, I was suddenly in an environment where the rules were different. Emotions were not things overtly displayed, not everyone wanted to argue all the time, and when they did voices were not raised and tempers did not flare. Very strange indeed. After a while, and after twice apologizing to professors for my exuberant vehemence I began to get the idea. And it did plant some seeds regarding my thinking about emotion and argument.

This was also when I began teaching Intro Logic, or as we called it, baby logic. I’d become enamoured of logic in the year and one-half I spent at SUNY Buffalo prior to moving to the University of Waterloo in Ontario. There I had been schooled in Classical, Modal and non-standard logic and the Philosophy of Mathematics. After one year as a TA for Intro Philosophy, they discovered I could teach baby logic and immediately plopped me into my own classroom. If I recall correctly, I was using E.J. Lemmon’s *Beginning Logic* (1965), a natural deduction system.

Now the University of Waterloo is renowned for its computer and engineering programmes, and like many schools the techies were required to take a year of Arts courses. The computer jocks would invariably take baby logic because to them it was a snap. The Artsies, on the other hand, would suffer as they invariably claimed to have a “math block,” which was typically not true. In any case, if they had anything, it would be an arithmetic block. So, I had one half of a class breezing through and the other half moaning and whining non-stop. Then I had an epiphany; one which put me on the road to Argumentation Theory. I dropped the meta-logic component and no longer covered completeness and consistency. Instead, I added sections on three-valued logic and modal logic. These raised philosophical issues

of bivalence and possible worlds, as well as other interesting matters. Certainly more so than meta-logic, which while intended to reassure us of the reliability of Formal Logic, did no such thing.

This was my first step of disloyalty to Formal Deductive Logic [FDL], and more followed. I first turned to Informal Logic in search of something that was less intellectually arid. That worked for a while, and I even published the first of several editions of *How to win an Argument* (2008), a trade book on reasoning and fallacies. In those days especially in Canada, the popular text was *Logical self-defense: the craft of evaluating persuasion in everyday life* (Johnson and Blair, 1977) (LSD), for which, in fact I was one of the referees. But in the early editions of LSD there were explicit and strong constraints on allowing emotion into an argument. While later editions softened this stricture, it was never completely abandoned.

I began to think that there was a serious difficulty in the very concept of argument. I wrote a paper in which I distinguished between an argument and a dispute. The latter was a communicative process between people, while the former was an object occurring in a dispute. (Yes, I know, but wait.) I submitted the paper and was asked who could referee it. I suggested someone whose book on communication I had read. A while later the report came back pointing me to the JAFa crew, and, in particular, Daniel O’Keefe’s recent article “Two concepts of Argument” (O’Keefe, 1977). I’d been scooped! On the one hand this was a disappointment, but on the other it exposed me to a cadre of scholars who had concerns similar to mine. I had a lot of catch-up work to do.

The work was fascinating, but it still lacked the embrace of emotion and, dare I say it, chaos which to me was a natural part of interactive argument. The one exception among all these fine scholars was Charles Arthur Willard. His essay, “A Reformulation of the Concept of Argument: The Constructivist/Interactionist Foundations of a Sociology of Argument” (Willard, 1978) expressed many thoughts I had been having. He encouraged me to attend ISSA, the second one, where I met a multitude of scholars including many from my home of Canada.

I am not going to, yet again, expound my theory of multi-modal argumentation. If you care to look at a good summary I refer you to (Gilbert, 2026). Suffice it to say that one of the modes with which we communicate is the emotional mode, and I believe it is present in virtually, if not all, human interactions including, ipso facto, arguing. The walls of Fortress Logic and Deductivism are definitely showing signs of weakening. Stress cracks are appearing in its fortifications. As we look around the world today

it is apparent that far more people are arguing with emotion than logic and, no, that's not always a good thing. It is why we must understand and study how it is used in argument; which is why I wrote *Arguing with People* (Gilbert, 2014) a trade book that is comprehensible to the person on the street. (It is also in Spanish.)

Shortly after I began this piece, likely my final writing, the Bondi Beach Pogrom took place in Australia. As a result I was emotionally crippled for some time and could not write. This tragedy as well as those in Minneapolis and elsewhere have raised emotions worldwide. Now more than ever we need to pay attention to them, understand them and use them creatively and purposively. They will never go away, and they should not. They are at the core of everything we know and understand. Let us embrace them, respect them, and, yes, direct and control them.

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