

Реторика, визуална реторика и визуална аргументация
Rhetoric, Visual Rhetoric and Visual Argumentation

**The understanding of the human being
and its relevance for persuasion**

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Abstract: The different ways of defining the human being or of perceiving human essence involve shifts of the persuasive power among the three persuasive appeals. Aristotle defined man as an “animal that has *logos*,” but for him *logos* is only one of the three appeals. Nowadays, there is a very widespread sensibility in favour of the strong weight of *pathos*, which is sometimes sentimentalism, but often, it is simply a response to a paradigm of humanity that takes emotion more into account, without replacing reason with emotion. This sensibility is noticeable in the current propensity to see “human” traits in non-human animals, not primarily in their intelligence, but in attitudes that resemble acts of care. This means that we recognize humanity in care. Philosophy of care places vulnerability at the same level as rationality in the definition of the human being and in the relationships that are created between people. This highlights how truly social – communitarian – the “knowledge society” could become.

Key words: human identity, care, argumentation, knowledge society, pathos, empathy.

Intorduction

The purpose of this article is to identify some of the traits of the contemporary profile of persuasion which can be attributed to the current way of conceiving the human being. That is to say: to identify which argumentative strategies are actually more persuasive nowadays and what relationship they have to what we consider human. An important factor in the human profile is the type of knowledge that is most appreciated in a certain era.

1. Knowledge Society

Accordingly, our argumentations and those that can most easily persuade us are related to the types of knowledge to which we are inclined to give particular importance. These cognitive priorities vary from person to person, but they also

characterize cultures and historical ages. Think of the Platonic dialogues and the remarkable variety of reasoning at work within them. The medieval method of the *quaestio* is a little different: on the one hand, it contributed to the formation of a true university of dialogue, but on the other hand, it seems clear that it formed minds that were more demonstrative than argumentative, according to the current distinction between these two types of reasoning. [1]

Moreover, think of periods dominated by a markedly scientific sensibility and by contrary reactions, such as, for example, the contrast between positivism and antipositivism. Nietzsche's much-quoted thesis "we have no facts, we only have interpretations" [2] is considered by some to be a pure antipositivist provocation. René Girard, for example, says that one cannot deduce a metaphysics from it, and it is only: "the result of a brilliant polemic against vetero-positivists, who were convinced that they uttered an immortal scientific truth every time they opened their mouths. But Nietzsche's *boutade* certainly cannot function as a theory of interpretation: having nothing but interpretations is the same as having nothing at all." [3]

Nietzsche himself, as Girard adds, often moves away from this position.

In order to identify the types of knowledge, we can resort to the modalities of reason; these can be formal, demonstrative, dialectical, rhetorical, or poetic, if we follow the scheme of the Aristotelian *organon* in its broadest form. Nowadays diversification often leads to dichotomies such as male / female, east / west, right hemisphere / left hemisphere. A distinction that can probably offer better analytic tools, which includes these dichotomies, is that between *soft reason* and *hard reason*, proposed by Marcelo Dascal [4], with which the typology of Carlos Pereda [5] almost fully coincides, albeit with different names: *emphatic reason* and *austere reason*, respectively. In extremely simple terms, the difference lies in the use of analogous concepts and probable reasoning, as well as univocal concepts and necessary reasoning, for the first type of reason, and the exclusive admission of univocity and necessity for the second type. [6]

In particular, I would like to point out the widespread sensibility, in our times, that favours the resources of empathy, a spontaneous appreciation of everything that implies a relationship between people, with a certain understanding of the inner life of the other.

2. Overcoming Pure Information

The current phenomenon of the over-abundance of information without criteria for discernment is widely-known. The idea of the "knowledge society," as opposed to the "information society" [7] responded to this very phenomenon [8].

The internet has everything: valid and less valid, true and false, and in a variety of forms and genres that, if exchanged, lead what was not valid to be considered valid and vice versa. The same can be said of the “relevant/non-relevant” dichotomy. Something similar had always happened in libraries, but access to the internet and the ease of making anything you want public, reveals a very different phenomenon. Discernment is required: a discernment that not everyone possesses. Either you acquire it through an effective educational path, or you rely too much on intuition, which often means relying on emotion. And unfortunately, it is often forgotten that emotionality needs to be educated. “Communicating knowledge also implies giving interpretative ‘categories’, mental work tools, patterns of reasoning, and readings of reality”. [9] This educational task includes identifying the type of knowledge that most often supports persuasion, in order to facilitate the perception of the content to be communicated.

Before going any further, I think it is important to point out that the step from pure information to knowledge only consists of overcoming certain limits, not of achieving a model that is a comprehensive answer. Just talking about knowledge does not tell us how fully human it is. Since that is not the theme of this paper, I will briefly refer to the work of Gert Biesta, who, for the understanding of education, insists on the recovery of teaching, in contrast to the pedagogy that, by emphasizing the activity of the student (learning), has forgotten the values of the person of the teacher, the “givenness,” the essential human quality that consists in being able to receive a teaching. [10]

I would like to point out two constructive phenomena in the current climate of understanding what is human: on the one hand, the attention given to emotional intelligence, especially the fact that is not only the project of recovering emotions and studying them together with the intellect, but the recognition of an emotional dimension in intelligence itself; and on the other hand, the evaluation of care (within the *care philosophy* and *ethics of care*) as an activity that is characteristic of human identity, which from a sociological point of view, is linked to relationality. [11]

Fundamental rhetoric (*Fundamentalrhetorik*) can play a decisive role in articulating all of this, because it is a real anthropology (*fundamentalrhetorische Anthropologie*) or at least it proposes to be. [12] Perhaps we occasionally run the risk of reducing anthropology to rhetoric, but the goal is still an anthropological deepening of rhetoric. [13] For Oesterreich this is about: “a regional anthropology whose subject is not the entire being of man, but the aspect of his/her public existence. Accordingly, the centre of its reflections is not the pure thinking activity of human beings but their public speaking activity.” [14]

3. Definitions of the Human Being

The subject of the paper was introduced as “the relevance of the understanding of the human being,” in order to emphasize that our main interest is precisely what *we think* the human being is, how *we perceive* it, and what *we believe* is human. Aristotle’s approach to definition is not always the same. His definitions may be more ontological or more dialectical, depending on the purpose of his reflection. [15] Melissa Moschella, to whom we shall refer here for the relationship between reason and emotion, quotes Charles Taylor [16], who states: “what I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me”. [17] This is the meaning in a sense that is more vital than ontological. We can illustrate this distinction with the difference between the meaning of the word *mosquito* (and therefore the definition: ‘insect, *Diptera*...’) and what *the mosquito* means to me (sleepless nights, itching, exasperation...).

Abraham Heschel (Martin Buber’s successor in Frankfurt) uses various definitions of the human being [18], from those of Aristotle (rational animal, political animal...) to other modern and equally known ones (*homo faber*), and others. He cites, for example, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition [19]. which says: “Man is a seeker after the greatest degree of comfort for the least necessary expenditure of energy” [20]. It should be clarified that this is not a definition in the strict sense, but a quality attributed to human beings under the entry “civilization,” in a context in which the subject is the historical development of humans towards an altruism that does not eliminate their selfish tendency – and thus it is in this context that the aforementioned formulation comes into play as well as the assumption that this property will always accompany human beings.

Having read the encyclopaedic suggestion, it is interesting to note that the *Vocabolario della Lingua Italiana*, published by the Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana (called “Vocabolario Treccani”), defines man as “A conscious being who is responsible for his own acts, capable of detaching himself from the organic world by objectivising it and using it for his own ends, and as such, a subject whose acts cannot immediately be reduced to the laws that regulate the rest of the physical world”. [21] This is precisely the starting point of the “Uomo” entry. On the other hand, the encyclopaedia, also developed by the *Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana* [22], has a completely zoological approach. Actually, it does not have an “Uomo” entry, but only “Origine dell’uomo”. In the digital version one can comfortably follow the series of concatenated definitions: *Man*, ‘Mammal of the order Primates, family Hominids, genus *Homo*’ [23]; *Hominids*, ‘Zoological family of the order Primates...’; *Homo*: ‘Genus belonging to the order Primates’.

After quoting Encyclopaedia Britannica, Heschel asks: “do we still recognize man here?”. [24] Then, having reported other definitions of the human being, he believes that it has not been possible to truly define human essence, and from the reality of attempts at definition he tries to define him as “a being who asks questions concerning himself”. [25]

It is in asking such questions concerning himself that man discovers that he is a person, and it is the kind of questions he asks that reveals his condition. Our question is not only: What is the nature of the human species? but also: What is the situation of the human individual? What is human about a human being? Specifically, our theme is not only: What is a *human being*? but also: What is *being human*? [26]

Heschel also includes relationality in the human essence. The search for meaning leads to the other. With regard to strictly individual needs, Heschel asks: “After satisfaction, what?”. [27] The other, however, does not appear in the form of a “need of the other” in such a way that the need is satisfied when the other is found, or in such a way that the other does something that satisfies our need. Rather, the way in which the discovery of meaning has to do with the other is in discovering the need to be needed by someone, “the craving to satisfy a craving”. [28] In this way, for Heschel, human happiness lies in being needed: “Nature is replete with opportunity to satisfy all our needs except one—the need of being needed”. [29]

4. Emotionality in the Conception of the Human Being

The sensibility I want to highlight is not only a new evaluation of the relational qualities, but also a new approach to emotionality, because it does not consist in saying that “in addition to intelligence, there is also emotion,” but we are driven to recognize a dimension aimed at emotion in intelligence itself. Rationalism is quite often accompanied by sentimentalism, precisely because “pure” reason cannot cover fields of human life that are instead the territory of emotion. Given, then, that one cannot live without emotions, one tries to recover them, but in reintroducing them, one encounters a lack of balance because reason continues to be a “pure reason.” “The real issue – says Moschella – is not rationality versus sentiment [...] but rather an emaciated view of rationality devoid of a capacity to know the good”. [30] Moschella sees this as being in contrast with rationalist individualism, recalling that “Hume’s sentimentalism actually flows from his reduction of rationality to the calculation of means to achieve the ends dictated by desire”. [31]

Moschella reveals the difficulties that an individualistic liberal mentality

has in understanding and evaluating care, and in recognizing the dignity of the acts of care and, therefore, of the professions that have the care of people as their purpose (as well as non-professional activities, especially in the family, which consist in taking care of someone). Here it is worth remembering that, beyond childhood, illness, old age and poverty, care concerns the whole, immense sphere of everyday life: eating, dressing, moving, resting, personal hygiene, etc. In all of these areas we manifest ourselves as “dependent rational animals,” according to the title of MacIntyre’s work [32], and this rationality does not seem to end with calculation and *hard reason*. The same happens to the five main skills of emotional intelligences that Daniel Goleman talks about: 1. Knowledge of one’s own emotions; 2. The ability to control one’s emotions; 3. The ability to motivate oneself; 4. Recognition of others’ emotions; and 5. Relationship management. [33]

For care activities, the expressions “emotional labour” and “emotional professions” have become common, because “care involves emotional work, and emotional work is the reason that acts on the feeling with a view to the good of a particular person”. [34]

It is here that I find it pertinent to point out how familiar we are with care in the profile of what we call humanity, of what constitutes the essence of the human being: not as a conscious development of that profile, but as a spontaneous recognition that in some cases could not be accepted in an explicit way. It is not difficult to realize that in our time we have a strong tendency to recognize the human in the acts of care. A clue to this phenomenon is the current propensity to see “humanity” in animals [35] when they perform acts very similar to acts of care. Scenes of animals that care for humans or other animals are striking to us, and in this—even more than in acts that manifest intelligence—we find them very “human.” In other times, intelligence was given more prominence.

Finding intelligence in animals did not really enlighten our humanity. Now, however, it is important to note that we find “humanity” in the actions of animals, which depend heavily on the emotions and, therefore, we find it in what, for a rationalistic/liberal mentality, is the non-human in human being. Human action is an action of the person that includes reason and emotion. The fact that we are dependent animals means that we have a constitutive vulnerability, to which care is a response.

5. The Positive and the Negative

In this knowledge society, where knowledge is emotionally coloured, there is a positive and a negative aspect. The positive one is the re-evaluation of care and therefore of relationality as constitutive of the person. In contrast to the in-

dividualism of modern thought, one rediscovers that “our thinking is inevitably dialogical, language based, and therefore social”. [36] The human being does not develop as a man or woman without relationships with other men and women, which is rather different in animals. But not only that: the human being also needs to reflect on his or her own development. “Dolphins can flourish without being able to argue with and learn from others about dolphin flourishing. Humans at times cannot flourish without arguing with others and learning from them about human flourishing”. [37]

The negative aspect is the risk, which often becomes the reality, of hypertrophic emotionality. Some extremes are the tendency to shorten the distance between the animal and the human and the quantitative consideration of the human in the immensity of the universe, with a consequent loss of meaning.

If the experience of animal emotion is the basis of the tendency to put humans and animals on the same level, then it must be said that the passage contains a certain tautology. Emotionality has a very accentuated presence in animals, precisely because there are no tendential faculties superior to it, while in human beings, there is the will. In most modern philosophies it is difficult to find such focus on animal interiority as we find in authors such as Aristotle, Avicenna, or Albert the Great [38], When we have a poor philosophical psychology, a more or less complex action performed by an animal immediately pushes us to shorten the distance between man and animals. The authors cited instead recognize a great inner richness in the animal that must be known and deepened.

It is not difficult to perceive the dizzying contrast between the cosmic immensities and the modest dimensions in which human life takes place. I think this is one of the central meanings of Terrence Malik’s film *Tree of Life* (2011), which explains the seemingly disproportionate amount of time it devotes to cosmic images and of the origin of life. Viewers see that a smile at the table, an answer, or a gesture of understanding, are more valuable than such grand realities [39] – even a squabble, for example, in the spirit in which Malala Yousafzai, admitted to the Children’s Hospital of Birmingham after an attack by the Taliban in her native Pakistan, tells of her family’s arrival many days later: “I was even happy to see my brother Khushal, as I needed someone to fight with” [40]. The quantitative approach is the basis of the justification of the crime of Raskolnikov and is almost instinctively how value is taken away from a life. In this light, a gang-member in a novel by Georges Siménon said: “So we went all out on this idea: mankind is just a patch of mould on the earth’s crust. So human life and death do not matter, pity is only a sickness”. [41]

Reflection on the immensity of the universe would seem to have nothing

to do with emotion, but with pure reason: everything rests on dimensions, which are data of astronomical science. However, even though being enormous or being minute are clearly data, the premise that the cosmos is disproportionate does not, for the human being, seem to be a *datum* (in an infinite space every finite dimension is small). We judge it that way because it *impresses* us, it *amazes* us, it *gives us vertigo*.

6. Fundamental Rhetoric

It is necessary to make a hermeneutic of the gestures of care. These are gestures of relationship, which find meaning where the purely quantitative and univocal reasoning (*hard reason*) cannot. We said above that Carlos Pereda calls this reason “austere,” which is different from “emphatic” reason, which corresponds quite well to *soft reason*. The title of the final chapter of his book *Vértigos argumentales* is almost a summary of the whole work: “Defending an emphatic reason is the best defense of reason”. [42] *Soft reason* is able to understand and defend *hard reason*, but not vice versa.

Here, fundamental rhetoric becomes enlightening, which “on the guide of the classical and modern rhetoric theory and hermeneutical phenomenology tries to gain a holistic and everyday-life-oriented conception of person, through which man should be understood as a being of creative speech activity”. [43] This holistic approach leads us to recognize the unity of the human being against any fragmentation, for example, that of managing the *ethos* as a pure strategy and the *eunoia* as something that can be simulated. Just as *we are* our body, *we are* also our image. Georgiana Burbea, speaking of *ethos* and identity, speaks of self-image and quotes Goffman, although she does not mention the notion of *face*. [44] We, rather, are mentioning it here, because it is that *face*, that self-image, the object of care that is at the centre of the theory of politeness – care that concerns the person itself, because of the very unity of the human being. *Ethos* as a persuasive appeal, and as an image that is not to be separated from the person himself or herself, leads us to a double consideration.

On the one hand, the argumentations based on empathy and care have a particularly persuasive force today because contemporary sensibility supports the recognition of the goodwill of the speaker (or of what is considered goodwill). In every argumentation, the persuasive role of goodwill (that of the speaker) lies in arousing the goodwill of the interlocutor [45], in the specific sense of the ‘will to understand’, but not every effective argumentation has such a close link between the two good wills as the ones we are analysing now, because this sensitivity resides precisely in the appreciation of empathy [46]. In this quality of

goodwill, one can see a link between *ethos* and *pathos*, since “trust is the core of communication as the fabric of human coexistence. What is convincing is the truth that responds benevolently to a desire of the heart”. [47]

On the other hand, what we can do to take care of someone is most of the time to take care of his or her image. For centuries, there have been reflections on one’s good name and good reputation, especially in the moral field but also in the simply civic sphere. Some people are especially sensitive to honour, but there is a minimum threshold that is universal. Among the extreme cases (which often become stereotypes) we can mention Spain and Japan, just to give a Western and an Eastern example. The balanced evaluation of the good name, of honour, is the ethical version – and *ante litteram* – of the interconnection that I propose between philosophy of care and theory of politeness.

The image that politeness deals with has a very subjective element: it is “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself”. [48] The will of the subject is added to the possible distance between reality and image, and this subject may want an image that does not correspond to reality (in terms of deception or narcissism), but even with the best of intentions self-knowledge is a difficult endeavour. We know how we are and what image we offer, to a large extent, from the reactions we see in others. This is also true in other areas of life: it is quite normal for others to have a better sense than we do of what value we have.

While each person is the ultimate authority for himself with regard to his desires, very often another person – a physician, trainer, teacher, or parent – may know more about a person’s good than he himself does, especially early in life. [49]

The process of a person’s maturation includes, among the central elements, the achievement of an autonomy of judgement about goods, which does not mean rejecting relationality, but rather, involving other persons in order to obtain a proper judgement, personally assuming the result [50]. MacIntyre articulates the transition in three steps, which Moschella lists as follows: a) “learning to stand back from one’s desires” (MacIntyre: “that movement from merely having reasons to being able to evaluate our reasons as good or bad reasons”); b) “capacity to imagine possible futures” (an activity that tests one’s independence from the factuality in which one lives and from the reasons received from others), and c) the need to “learn to prioritize among goods and to direct our desires and actions in a way that is consistent with our priorities”. [51] In this final step, Moschella proposes another formulation, quoting MacIntyre: “to learn to understand ourselves as directed to a range of goals that are more or less remote from our present situation and to order our desires accordingly”. [52]

Conclusion

The necessary relationality of this process and the indispensable contribution of others in their perception of themselves and what is good for them, not only outline the role of the *caregiver* but also mark the heart of the whole of society, because each person is a *caregiver* to the extent that he or she is human. If in the face of a protective gesture of an animal we think of the adjective “human,” it seems clear that our spontaneous definition of the human being has to do with relationality and the call to responsibility. From within the dynamics of goals and desires, means and objectives, etc., the evaluation of different persuasive strategies is an open question, and there are certainly challenges to be overcome in each individual case. However, if we speak generally about human life and consider it in the current conditions of our perception, it seems clear that the argumentations based on the goodness of caring for others, in its various manifestations, now have a strength that they have not always had.

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- [6] “Let us dub ‘Hard Reason’ a conception or rationality that admits only the use of rigorously defined concepts, of experimentally controlled data, and of logically valid arguments. On this view, all solvable problems and disputes can be solved by strict adherence to the above requirements, which provide a decision procedure determining which side is right and which is wrong. Hard Reason also believes it is the only form of rationality deserving its name. Anything that deviates from its requirements is Non-Reason. Nevertheless, there are those who hold a conception of rationality that admits also the use of concepts that are not definable in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, the occasional reliance upon data and propositions that are only presumably correct, the acceptability (on occasion) of arguments that are not valid according to standard logic but are pertinent, and the existence of

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for the entries “Ominidi” and “Homo”. The same goes for the vocabulary: “Uomo”, *Treccani, la Cultura Italiana. Vocabolario*, retrieved on April 9th, 2020, <http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/uomo/>. Retrieved on 10.04.2020.

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