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REVIEW / RECENZJA

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Recenzja/Review: Barbara Konat, *Emotional Appeals in Argumentation. From Rhetoric to Psychology and Artificial Intelligence*. Cham: Springer, 2025.

Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Cognitive Science in Poznań, Barbara Konat offers in *Emotional Appeals in Argumentation* an helpful synthesis of many years of research on emotional appeals in argumentation, notably the project "Computational Pathos", supported by the Polish National Science Centre, of which she was the principal investigator. Although the title unsurprisingly echoes, given the series in which the volume appears, the terminology of argumentation theory and of so-called fallacies of "appeals to emotion", the central concern of this 160-page book, published in 2025 in the *Argumentation Library* series, is more specifically—and more appropriately—the rhetorical question of pathos.

The volume crowns the work carried out by the group behind the "Computational Pathos" project, but it also perfectly illustrates, through its alignment with contemporary research orientations, the renewal of the field that has become visible in recent years and that rests on at least three foundations. First—and this has become self-evident, although it still struggles to penetrate certain minds—emotions should not be reduced to fallacious appeals, but should be regarded as an integral part of the means of persuasion, inseparable from reason and comparable in this respect to the construction of self-image (*ethos*). Second, especially when a computational dimension is introduced, analyses and models need to be grounded in texts as they actually occur, rather than in fabricated, stylized, or simplified examples. Third, due attention must be paid to the emergence of innovative methods capable of investigating fields that were once largely inaccessible.

The book, however, does more than testify to the modernity of its research agenda. Across three parts, it establishes a descriptive model for the analysis of *pathos*, moving, as the subtitle indicates, from Aristotle to generative artificial

intelligence. Such a broad span may seem ambitious, but it is framed by a series of explicit and carefully assumed choices to set aside certain aspects. Some are excluded for epistemological reasons: adopting a precise and strongly Aristotelian definition of pathos as an effect produced in the audience entails leaving aside, for instance, work concerned with emotion as inscribed in discourse. Others are excluded for methodological reasons: computational analysis does not easily account for individual variability, the prior emotional state of the audience, and so forth.

Before discussing the three parts of Konat's book—"Classical Foundations and the Interactional Model of Pathos" (49 pages), "Language and Psychology of Pathos" (38 pages), and "Artificial Intelligence for Pathos" (57 pages)—I shall allow myself a brief personal detour. At the time of my doctoral dissertation, I had hoped to bring textual linguistics and discourse analysis into dialogue with the three rhetorical means of persuasion. Yet I rather quickly gave up on pathos. Aristotle's definition, which Konat adopts and refines, rests on a twofold perlocutionary effect: the emotion experienced by the audience, and the persuasive effect of that emotion. I was convinced that the question eluded any scientific undertaking, for lack of observable data and because of the impossibility of reading the minds of audience members. Barbara Konat shows how this impasse can be overcome: the grounding of her research in a methodology that is both experimental and computer-assisted is convincing and highlights new and rapidly expanding research opportunities.

Another reason had led me to abandon *pathos*: emotion lies at the centre of numerous research traditions in psychology, a discipline outside my own area of competence. It must indeed be stressed that *pathos* is necessarily an interdisciplinary field, situated at the intersection of language, argumentation theory, and psychology. Konat, however, works in a Faculty of Psychology and has a research trajectory that integrates philosophy, social communication, and computational argumentation. The promise of interdisciplinarity lies in its capacity to address complex transversal objects such as appeal to emotion; its drawback is that one risks either becoming lost in the respective complexities of the disciplines involved or simplifying them excessively, to the point of caricature. Barbara Konat acknowledges some simplifications, carefully justified, but she also presents, with remarkable synthetic skill, a rich and up-to-date state of the art across the relevant disciplines. She also builds her analytical model, the Model of Interactional Pathos in Argumentation, progressively and pedagogically throughout a clear book that can be recommended to any newcomer interested in emotion in persuasion.

In the first part, Konat situates her model by presenting the epistemological foundations of her research within a broad multidisciplinary panorama. Adopting an Aristotelian perspective according to which pathos is elicited by emotional

appeals, rather than being emotion produced in discourse, she develops a descriptive rather than normative model, refraining from judging whether emotional appeals are reasonable or not, while acknowledging that her descriptive model of analysis, Inference Anchoring Theory (Budzynska & Reed 2011) reconstructs arguments and therefore involves an unavoidable interpretive dimension in the process. Konat also situates argumentation in relation to persuasion and manipulation in a brief but efficient and illuminating synthesis.

Alongside Aristotle, Konat is inspired by the foundational work of Douglas Walton. After showing the importance of Walton's early work on the place of emotion in argumentation (1992), she grounds her research, first, in the typology proposed by Walton, Reed, and Macagno (2008), which enables her to identify defeasible argument types related to pathos: arguments from positive and negative consequences, fear and danger appeals, threats, slippery slope arguments, waste, and need for help. Second, Macagno and Walton's (2014) work on the language of emotion also serves as inspiration for a Polish emotion lexicon of 6000 words, which she tests in an argumentative framework. However, whereas Macagno and Walton consider that emotion-provoking lexicon may itself be treated as argumentative, Konat regards argumentation as being primarily constructed from propositions, linked in a "p because q" relation, which may become, depending on the speaker's lexical selection, an emotional appeal. Tribute is also paid in this literature review to the work of Catherine Hundleby (2021) and Michael A. Gilbert (2022) in order to address the feminist and queer dimensions of argumentation in its relation to emotion. Konat emphasizes the sociocultural dimension of emotion and shows that the works cited reinforce the idea that the distinction between reason and emotion "is not just analytically flawed but also ideologically charged, reproducing hierarchies of gender, sexuality and epistemic authority" (p. 28).

Finally, the third chapter places the proposed model in continuity with three lines of research. The first is cognitive pragmatics, represented not only by the principles of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1996), but also by recent work in the pragmatics of emotion. The second is the Amsterdam school of pragma-dialectics (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004), important for its performative dimension, although it has not always granted a genuine place to the emotional dimension of argumentation. The third is the already mentioned model of description and analysis in argument mining, Inference Anchoring Theory, which functions more as a background framework than as a primary source: the book does not reproduce any analysis directly derived from IAT, but the analyses nevertheless draw on it. On the basis of these inspirations and of her previous work, Konat defines pathos as "an emotional appeal performed in a persuasive interaction by the speaker with the aim of eliciting emotions in the audience in order to increase the persuasive

strength of the speaker's argumentation" (p. 40). This definition makes it possible to distinguish the emotional appeal, as a locutionary act, from the emotional reaction, as a perlocutionary effect.

In the second part, Barbara Konat begins with a short fourth chapter detailing related work on emotion in discourse, emotion terms, and studies of metaphor as an affective device in argumentation. The fifth chapter, also very brief, offers an interesting synthesis of research in the psychology of emotions, particularly the categorical approach, which seeks to identify basic emotions, notably in the work of Ekman (1999). This framework allows Konat to introduce two experimental studies conducted by her research team.

The first of these studies is connected to Petty and Cacioppo's work on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (1986) and on the psychological and situational factors that influence how argumentation is perceived. The experiment measures the effects of personal involvement, mood, and emotional appeals on Perceived Argument Strength. In an original way, the study thus incorporates psychological data into the analysis of how arguments are received. It shows that weak arguments accompanied by a positive emotional appeal are generally perceived as stronger. This conclusion, however, must be mitigated by the importance of the variables involved: highly motivated individuals tend to perceive all arguments as stronger, as do individuals in a positive mood; indeed, these parameters appear to be even more important than the emotional appeal itself.

In the final part, Barbara Konat engages with the most recent developments in the field by beginning, in Chapter 7, with a synthesis of current research on computer-assisted analysis of argumentation and natural language, as well as on the advances and limitations brought about by the emergence and rapid development of Large Language Models since 2023. She shows in particular that LLMs are both an object of study and a potentially valuable tool, capable of supporting or even substituting the work of human annotators and improving the reliability of models, for instance in the automatic detection of emotions.

Chapter 8 first presents a computational study carried out by the team on pathos mining in argumentative pairs, consisting of premise and conclusion, combined with an analysis of the sentiments expressed by audiences in a political context. Although the analysis unsurprisingly shows that public discourse attracts emotional appeals, it also illustrates the extent to which a combined methodology can deepen our understanding of such appeals. While Chapter 8 does not yet bring LLMs into the picture, Chapter 9 illustrates how LLMs can assist, and in some respects replace, human annotation—while also acknowledging the limitations involved in entrusting a program devoid of emotional experience and cultural embeddedness with the task of analysing pathos in situated social interactions. Konat concludes

that, despite these limitations, LLMs "can be effectively used to identify emotional appeals in natural language argumentation across diverse contexts and languages" (p. 152).

By way of conclusion, it should be emphasized that *Emotional Appeals in Argumentation* is an accessible and engaging book, one that provides a clear overview of this interdisciplinary field. While it certainly offers interesting analytical results, its value also—and perhaps above all—lies in the stimulating research avenues and the epistemological and methodological reflections it opens up.

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