

MOTIVATION THEORY IN TEACHING PERSUASION: STATEMENT AND SCHEMA

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AT least since Aristotle observed that men in a state of emotion act differently than they do otherwise and postulated, therefore, that he who would persuade ought to know how the various emotions are aroused,¹ *pathos* has been considered an important part of rhetoric, or the theory of persuasive discourse.

Aristotle's concept of *pathos* is perhaps best thought of as a relational category designed to direct attention to the *interaction* of aspects of the discourse, states of emotion in the listeners, and the resultant persuasibility of the listener. Unfortunately, the concept has usually been translated as "emotional proof"; since the term "proof" seems to direct our attention to some statement or sequence of statements within the speech, the further notion of "emotional appeal" seems proper. By an all too easy process of linguistic seduction, the term "emotional appeal" has carried us from Aristotle's original concept of *pathos* into the position of perceiving any given instance of persuasive discourse as containing neat little passages which are "appeals." These appeals are designed to trigger responses called "emotions," which, since they can be named, must reside in small psycho-physiological packages in each listener, simply waiting

for the right button to be pushed to cause them to go into action.

Although this simplistic view of man's nature and the nature of discourse has been rather well discredited, speech teachers are still laboring to discover useful ways of talking with their students about the relationship between man's nature and the conduct of discourse. The theory of persuasion must include statements about why people behave as they do, and how such insights may be related to the analysis, planning, or conduct of discourse. But what kind of theorizing about the nature of man is reputable, appropriate, and useful for students of practical discourse?

One common answer given to this question is that of appropriating for texts in public speaking or persuasion certain bodies of material drawn from theorists in the field of psychology. The answer seems reasonable. Psychologists devote themselves to the study of behavior. They have asked repeatedly why people act as they do. They have sought to unleash the formidable instruments of science for the study of behavior, and thus to extend reliable knowledge of the nature of emotion and motivation. All this is so obviously relevant to the study of speech that whether the psychologist is William James or B. F. Skinner, James B. Watson or Gordon Allport, it is impossible to study his discussion of human behavior without the impression that much of what is being said ought to be useful to the student of persuasion or public speaking. In one sense teachers

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¹ See *Rhetorica* ii. 1. 1377^b 30; 1378^a 5, 20-25.

of speech have suffered the embarrassment of riches in dipping into psychological theory. The theorists are so numerous; their "systems" war with one another; terminology changes. In the midst of this profusion, the task of selecting categories for describing human behavior suitable to a course in persuasion or public speaking is almost intolerably complicated. If the study is decently attentive to the complexities of behavior, consideration of its relevance to the practical problems of conducting discourse may never be achieved. If the study of behavior is compressed to permit time for consideration of its relevance to discourse, it may simply perpetuate the mischief of such concepts as "emotional appeals," and "targets resting in the nervous system of the listener."

A reasonably accurate description of the solution sought by the most reputable speech texts and teachers would be as follows. The student is cautioned that the study of human motivation is important but complex. He is given a definition of motivation, and some accounting of how the internal structures which lead to goal-directed behavior are learned. He is cautioned not to believe that he understands a motive structure simply because he has named some general human goal. Then he is given a list of names for common human "motives." These often turn out to be the names of general goals sought by many people in our culture (the names may be of large categories of goals, such as "subsistence," or "mastery," or of somewhat more specific goals such as "profit" or "status"). The names of motives have the magic of seeming relevance to the conduct of discourse. The student now understands why he needed to study human behavior. If he promises his listeners "profit" or "status," the listener

will be motivated. The emotional appeal has been made. The button has been pushed. And we are back to a simplistic concept of behavior we started out to avoid.

Recently in this journal Otis M. Walter proposed a considerable departure from the analysis of motivation usual to speech texts or courses. Walter argued that theorists and teachers of persuasion must go beyond the generalized view of motivation which leads to the listing of names for motives. "We could assume that because so many rhetoricians use these lists," he writes, "they are considered of practical value in the teaching of speakers. It is not my aim here to suggest otherwise, but instead to show that motivation may be analyzed in a somewhat more detailed and perhaps more useful way."² Walter suggests the possible usefulness of abandoning the term motive in favor of an effort to identify the common "motivational situations" in which people disposed to act find themselves. He shows that by naming these situations, one can then propose "lines of argument" appropriately directed toward persons in these situations. Thus the study of motivational situations leads directly to practical consequences in the planning and conduct of discourse.

1.

Walter has taken a long step forward in analyzing motivation with reference to persuasive discourse. If any theory of motivation is useful in speech, it must be of value in the planning and conduct of discourse, or in the understanding of the speaker-audience-discourse relationship present in acts of persuasion. Although we applaud Walter's treatment of motivation as both more useful than

² Otis M. Walter, "Toward an Analysis of Motivation," *QJS*, XLI (October 1955), 271-278.

analyses which lead to the listing of motives, and as less subject to simplistic interpretation, we believe his concept of "motivational situation" may be too sharply removed from the characteristic psychological approach to human motivation. What we propose here is not a rejection of Walter's analysis of motivational situations, but an accounting of motivation which will supplement his analysis. We propose an accounting brief enough to be manageable, one which retains some of the characteristic terminology of psychology for the description of behavior, and one which can be linked rather directly to the problem of analyzing and managing persuasive discourse.

The study of motivation becomes initially a search for a set of terms, or categories, sufficient to give an accounting of human behavior which is consistent with what is known about such behavior, and useful to the uncovering of new evidence about such behavior. For the behavioral scientists, a test of such categories is the extent to which they cause questions to be asked which will be susceptible to scientific investigation. For the teacher of persuasion, a test of such categories is the extent to which they enable students to develop useful insight into the nature and conduct of discourse. This is not to suggest that the teacher of persuasion will necessarily want a different set of categories from those of the psychologist or sociologist; it is to suggest that he may want the simplest set of categories which are not at variance with the insights provided by the scientific study of behavior, and which will lead most readily into the consideration of the role of discourse in behavior.

In the search for such a set of terms, the term "motivation" can be used as a generic label for those factors internal-

ized by the individual which lead to different kinds of goal-directed behavior. The term "internalized" suggests that although internal structures of the organism lead to behavior (only the person can act), yet our understanding of the structures must always perceive the individual as responding or behaving in a situation. To view the study of motivation as situational is scarcely unique, since contemporary students of behavior are substantially in agreement that any accounting of behavior must view motivation not as a static property of the organism, but as a structure relating the organism to its environment.

If motivation is conceived as a situational structure, what is the minimal set of terms necessary for a description of this structure? Four such terms can be identified.

1. *Tension*

Although a variety of terms such as "drive," or "need" are used to account for stimulus elements incident to goal directed behavior, all of these terms proceed from a view of the organism as experiencing various conditions of internal tension which dispose it to action. Some deprivation, physiological or psychological, produces an imbalance which the organism strives to adjust. Physiological needs—food, regulation of bodily temperature, elimination, etc.—are the easiest to cite and are, hence, most often cited. That tensions arise not only from simple physiological needs but also from complex socially modified needs is quite obvious. Behavior which can be related to sex often grows out of tensions probably arising not from simply physiological needs but from tensions resulting from society's demands on its members to respond at given ages in given patterns.

2. *Learned Behavior Patterns*

Since the individual brings tensions

into balance continually, he will learn behavior patterns which are successful in relieving tensions. Customs in eating, courtship, and social amenities in general are readily accessible examples of this fact.

3. *Individual Interpretation*

But tension is not simply tension. It is possible to observe certain states of physiological or emotional deprivation which seem to produce similar tensions in all persons who experience them. It is equally possible to observe different persons in substantially the same environment experiencing different levels of tension, or giving quite different descriptions of the nature of the tension which they experience. The complexity of human behavior rests in the unique and central role of language in mediating that behavior. Thus tension, to a human being, is an occasion for interpretation, and the tension "is known" not simply through some physical reaction but through some verbal accounting of the situation. Having gone without food for some hours, one man may say simply, "I am hungry." Another may say, "My stomach aches because my wife has been nagging me." The first may walk to the refrigerator, or follow some other pattern of learned behavior relevant to his interpretation of his tension. The second man may seek to restore equilibrium in his environment with a martini, or a walk in the evening air. In even more complex constructs, the international problems of Russia and the United States may apparently pass unnoticed by one man. A second may find the nature of his discontent to be the presence of a powerful, dynamic and unfriendly Russian state which threatens his security. A third may believe that his experience with tension is the product of an excessive number of proto-communists among his neighbors.

It is uniquely the fact of human behavior that its most significant dimensions involve acts of interpretation on the part of the individual in which he uses language both to identify the nature of his sense of tension, and to identify the kind of learned behavior, verbal or otherwise, seemingly appropriate to the situation. Language is not only a form of behavior; it is uniquely the form which mediates, through acts of interpretation, the individual's perception of his condition within his environment. This fact provides the persuader with both his problem and his opportunity.

4. *Goals*

Understanding the central importance of interpretation in human conduct, we are in position to observe that the linguistic act of interpretation gives rise to the category of goals. Ordinarily motivated behavior has an end in the environment of which the individual is a part. This end is knowable and known to human beings simply as a verbal construct. Tensions may find their source either in verbal or non-verbal aspects of the person and his environment. Learned behaviors may be either verbal or non-verbal.

But goals rise only from acts of interpretation. They indicate a belief that human beings may select to some extent the end toward which their behavior is directed and may predict to some extent the consequences of their behavior. Man marshals both the past and the future in his acts of interpretation. He can do this only through language. In using language to denominate ends that he seeks, or changes in his environment he wishes to bring about, or actions in which he wishes to direct himself and others, man establishes those constructs we call goals.

Although it is useful to separate the

concept of goal from such concepts as tension or learned behaviors or interpretation, it is clear that the concept goal does not exist independently of these other categories used in a description of human behavior. Thus, when we interpret, or give a name to an experience of tension, we may also implicitly name a goal. "I am being hounded to pay my bills," we say; and implicitly we have said, "I need money," or "I must get some money." In converse fashion, the identification or labeling of a goal may be sufficient to create the experience of tension. "I want a new car," we say, and the identification of a goal becomes a source of tension until the goal is either achieved or abandoned. Goals rise from tension, and goals create tension. They are the verbal concomitants of any experience with tension which has been interpreted.

These categories—tension, learned behavior, individual interpretation, and goals—constitute the minimal set of categories needed for the analysis of behavior. In a sense they provide a definition of the term "motivation." The larger label hypothesizes the existence of factors internalized by the individual which lead to goal-directed behavior, and thus stipulate that at some level behavior is caused, can be understood, and can be influenced. The smaller categories of tension, et cetera, direct us toward an examination of relevant data about the individual and his environment when we are interested in interpreting or influencing his behavior.

2.

Any attempt to present an abstract analysis of a phenomenon raises the difficulty of retaining the essential sense of the unity, i.e., of the phenomenality, of what is analyzed. Our lengthy definition of motivation may be summarized

in a quasi-physical formulation which helps emphasize its situational character:

$$M = (T + LB) I \longleftrightarrow G$$

In this schema motivation (M) is the label for the totality of those factors internalized by an individual which lead to various sorts of goal-directed behavior. These internalized factors may be described as the experiencing of tension (T) and the learned patterns of behavior (LB) associated with those tensions. In human behavior the meaning of any experience with tension, or with the conduct or interruption of any learned behavior, is mediated by the use of language in acts of interpretation (I). The language behavior characteristic of acts of interpretation gives rise to the identification of goals (G). These goals serve both as the ends of tension initiated behavior and as the sources for altered patterns of tension, behavior, or interpretation.

We have found the schema a useful way of introducing students of persuasion to the concept of motivation. It permits an expanded or abbreviated discussion of the tension producing potential of various physiological or psychological needs experienced by the organism. It gives attention to the significant role of learning in the development of either verbal or non-verbal behavior patterns. The tension-learned behaviors-goal relationship adapts itself readily to discussion of the important part played by reinforcement in the learning of verbal or non-verbal behavior, and to this extent the schema is readily adaptable to learning theory. It provides a strategy for dealing with the confusion usual to the use of such terms as "need" and "goal" by showing that although goals are structurally or interpretatively linked to tensions, the perception of

goals may be tension-creating, whereas the attainment of goals may not in every case relieve tension.

Perhaps the most important term in the schema is that of "interpretation." The introduction of this concept into the analysis of behavior permits ready perception of behavior as situational, and provides a useful bridge to the consideration of the significant role of language in the development and control of behavior. Language provides the structure within which people perceive, or locate (interpret) their tensions, and define (interpret) their goals. Language is the instrument for interpreting or giving meaning to the environment of the organism, but it is also a significant part of the environment of the organism. This latter relationship is of primary interest to the student of persuasion who wants to study how language affects the experiencing and interpreting of tensions, learned behavior, and goals.

At the most general level, the schema serves as a framework for examining any persuasive situation whatsoever in an effort to relate the activity of the persuader to the motivation of the persuadee. It is possible to observe the persuader using language in an effort to intensify latent tensions or to allay tensions. It is possible to observe the persuader using language to interpret tension so that it becomes linked to presumably relevant goals by types of behavior available to the audience. At the simplest level, an advertisement for a deodorant cream may be a blatant effort to stir up and interpret tensions latent in almost any interpersonal situation. In a much more complex sense, one could observe the extensive effort made by President Woodrow Wilson in call-

ing for a declaration of war on Germany, not only to make use of public tensions produced by the alleged acts of aggression by the German nation but also to reinterpret the tension existing in the American "search for peace" as capable of relief only through the act of war. "The war to end wars" became a sign interpreting the goal directed behaviors appropriate to the search for peace and an end to aggression.

The schema is consistent with or leads to the kind of treatment given motivation in Walter's article. Walter's set of "motivational situations" is an effort to establish a typology for the most common sorts of tension producing situations within which persuaders encounter audiences. To the extent that his typology fits the scene, it permits the linking of characteristic motivational situations to the range of *topoi* or lines of argument characteristically available in such situations.

3.

The purpose here has not been to contend that the schema is to be preferred for the scientific investigation of behavior. It is not scientific in its genesis, although it does no violence to tenets generally acceptable to behavioral scientists. Rather the statement is a strategic one—a search for a minimal set of terms in a structural relationship which will serve the purposes of the student of persuasion in understanding and creating persuasive discourse. To the extent that the schema is teachable, that teaching it does not lead to a grossly oversimplified conception of human behavior, that it permits quick entry into the study of the linkages between persuasive discourse and human behavior—it may be useful.

