The goals of persuasion*

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This paper presents a model of persuasion in terms of goals and beliefs. Among the various ways to influence people, that is, to raise or lower the likelihood for them to pursue some goal, ranging from threat to suggestion, persuasion is viewed as a case of communicative non-coercive goal hooking. A persuader leads a persuadee to pursue some goal out of a free choice, i.e., by convincing him/her that the proposed goal is useful for some other goal that the persuadee already has. It is argued that the Aristotelian persuasive strategies of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* (rational argumentation, the speaker’s credibility and reliability, and the appeal to emotion) are always present in every persuasive discourse, and that they are exploited to raise the value of the goal proposed and to strengthen the believability of the link between it and the persuadee’s previous goals. The paper proposes an analysis of discourse in terms of a hierarchy of goals as a tool to single out these strategies within the discourse structure. By applying this model to different kinds of persuasive messages (political discourse, advertising, dialogues in the health domain), it shows how, in the fragments presented, this kind of analysis allows to clarify the relationships between the persuader’s and the persuadee’s goals and to elucidate how much and how directly the persuader appeals to *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* in his/her discourse.

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1. Introduction

In the literature of cognitive and social psychology on persuasion, much attention is paid to the cognitive aspects of persuasive processes. The weight that the target (the person to be persuaded, henceforth persuadee) attributes to the different aspects of this process — the source (the persuader) and the message (the contents communicated) — and the way in which they are processed are
its fundamental concerns. Some models study the “heuristics” through which we are persuaded (Chaiken 1980), others the “central” and the “peripheral” routes (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), that is, the rational vs. affective and contextual factors that lead to the conclusion aimed at by the source. These models account for the cognitive processes that take place in the persuadee, the inferential routes travelled, but do not take into consideration the relationship between the persuader’s and the persuadee’s intentions. In fact, they do not explain how a person who did not intend to behave in some way, is induced by the persuader’s action to behave in that way. Apart from a few exceptions (e.g., Fishbein and Ajzen 1981; Fazio 1986; Guerini et al. 2003), these models study the relationship between the beliefs of the persuadee and those transmitted by the persuader, but not the relationship between the persuader’s and the persuadee’s goals. Yet, persuasion is a process in which communicating beliefs to other people is aimed at influencing them. It is a process through which a person causes another person to have some beliefs in order to induce him/her either to have goals that s/he did not have before, or to give up previously held goals. Therefore, to understand persuasion, in addition to studying the cognitive processes of the persuadee, it is also necessary to study the goals of both the persuader and persuadee and the relationship between these goals, as well as the strategies used by the persuader to induce the other to pursue the goals s/he proposes.

In this paper I present an analysis of persuasion according to a model based on the notions of goal and belief (Conte and Castelfranchi 1995), while mainly stressing the role that the persuader’s and the persuadee’s goals play in communicative acts of persuasion. Obviously, I keep in mind that beliefs are crucial in persuasion (and this is coherent with the model I adopt, according to which, in cognitive systems like humans, the only way to change people’s goals is by changing their beliefs). In this paper, however, I primarily focus on the goals and only when absolutely necessary I consider the beliefs involved in persuasion.

I argue that a persuader’s goal is to cause a persuadee to activate and pursue a goal, by convincing him/her that this goal has a high value; that the persuader does so by connecting the proposed goal to other goals of the persuadee; and that rational, emotional and contextual factors can be simultaneously involved in the act of persuasion. I then illustrate a technique to analyse texts, discourses and other multimodal (verbal, body, graphic) communicative acts that is coherent with the model proposed. I do this by applying it to persuasive acts of different kinds (a political discourse, an advertisement, a dialogue between a
doctor and a pharmaceutical company agent, and a dialogue between a nurse and a patient). I show how these illustrations provide evidence confirming my view of persuasion, and how this kind of analysis makes it possible to extricate the different aspects of persuasion and to single out different patterns of their combination in a corpus of persuasive communicative acts.

2. A goal and belief model of mind and social interaction

Persuasion is a way to influence people, that is, one of the many ways an agent A causes another agent B to have some goal that B did not have previously, or to abandon one previously held. In order to study persuasion, then, it is necessary to have a clear view of what it means to influence other people, in terms of the goal and belief model adopted here.¹

The basic notions of this model are the following:

– a Goal is a state that regulates the behaviour or the morphological features of a system; this is a very abstract and general notion of goal that, contrary to the word goal in everyday language, does not necessarily refer to an individual’s conscious and deliberate intention. Therefore, it can be applied to natural and artificial, individual and collective systems (for example, persons, animals, machines, social organisations); furthermore, more specific notions, such as need, motive, instinct, intention, social end, biological function, can be subsumed under it (Castelfranchi and Miceli, forthcoming);

– in order to pursue its goals the system makes plans (Miller, Galanter, and Pribram 1960), i.e., more or less complex hierarchies of goals, sub-goals, and super-goals, to be achieved by using external and internal resources; external resources include objects present in the environment and, more generally, world conditions; internal resources encompass actions of the system’s repertoire, and beliefs about the world and the system itself;

– a terminal goal is a goal with no super-goals, usually a biologically basic goal such as survival, being loved, self-esteem and a few other goals;

– in a system, an interest is a state of the world that is objectively a means to achieve some goal of that system (for example, not to eat too many French fries is an interest for a patient who suffers from liver problems), and could then become one of its sub-goals; a system does not necessarily pursue an interest consciously, until it believes it is a sub-goal to its goals; and
sometimes, even in this case, it may not pursue the interest, simply because that interest/goal conflicts with other goals (the patient loves French fries);

– a **Belief** is some assumption represented in a system, whether consciously or not (that is, it may be meta-believed or not);

– an **Evaluation** is a belief about whether or how much some object, person or event is a useful means to some goal: a positive evaluation is a belief about its being a useful means, a negative evaluation is a belief about its being irrelevant or disadvantageous to some goal. It is through evaluation that one computes the **Value Coefficient (VC)** of a goal;

– a **Value** is the belief that a state of the world is definitely positive, which generates a terminal goal, one to be pursued as an end in itself (Miceli and Castelfranchi 1998).

– an **Emotion** is a subjective state, including cognitive, physiological, expressive, motivational aspects, that is triggered when a system assumes that some (real or imagined) state of the world causes or may cause the achievement or thwarting of an important goal of the system. Therefore, emotions have an important adaptive function, in that they monitor the state of achievement or thwarting of adaptively important goals.²

3. Where do goals come from?

How and why do people come to have goals? And what happens before a goal is pursued? Three moments are important in a system’s creation and management of goals: generation, activation, and choice.

3.1 Goal generation

A goal may be generated through a top-down or a bottom-up process. A top-down generation occurs when a goal is generated from a further goal it serves, and generally obeys a Goal Generation Rule (Conte and Castelfranchi 1995). If I believe that a state of affairs causes or implies a goal of mine, then that state of affairs becomes a goal of mine in its turn. For example: B is at the bus stop, but suddenly feels hungry, hence a goal is generated of looking for a grocery store. Or, B has the goal of helping people, so B conceives of the goal of becoming a doctor.

A goal may be generated bottom-up when the system believes that the conditions to reach it are fulfilled and/or the resources to pursue it are available.
While at the bus stop, I see a grocery store across the road, so the goals of crossing the road and buying pastry are generated. B’s father is a doctor and he has many patients, so B decides to become a doctor herself. This is the goal generation device typical of the bait, of temptation, of consumerism — the need is created by a belief about the existence of the resource.

3.2 Goal activation

When a goal has been generated, it may stay “asleep” for a variable length of time. It is activated when it enters the goal balance, when the system deems it worthy of possible pursuit. But activation does not necessarily imply pursuit. For example, in the case of conflicts among different activated goals, a choice among goals must be made.

3.3 Choice and values

Choice means that B decides to pursue a goal G1 in preference to another possibly pursuable goal G2 on the basis of a comparative evaluation of the two, that is, because B ultimately attributes a higher value coefficient (VC) to G1 than to G2. I choose a pastry with cream over one with chocolate because cream is more valuable to me than chocolate.

But how does one attribute a VC to a goal? Many different factors are involved in the determination of the Value Coefficient of a goal, as shown by studies in social and cognitive psychology — ranging from the expectancy-value models (Weiner 1992; Wigfield and Eccles 2000), through studies of cognitive bias in decision-making (Kahneman and Tversky 2000), up to the issue of bounded rationality (Mantkelow and Over 1993).

My hypothesis is that, whatever the values resulting from all of those factors, the VC of a goal is related to the VC of the super-goal it serves, in that the VC of a super-goal, so to speak, “reverberates” on the VC of its sub-goal: The more valuable the super-goal is, the more valuable the sub-goal turns out to be. More precisely, a goal receives its VC from its overall evaluation towards hierarchically higher goals, by taking into account not only the VCs of the goals it serves, but also those of the goals it thwarts. For instance, B may choose an uninspiring job near home over a prestigious job abroad if pursuing the goal of the prestigious job, in itself a highly valuable goal, at the same time compromises another goal, that of staying with his wife and children, which is more important to him.
4. Influencing others

Often a system does not have all the resources or cannot perform all the actions it needs to achieve its goals. According to the model I am relying upon (Conte and Castelfranchi 1995), social exchange and interaction multiply the resources of people and their potential to reach more goals than they could by themselves. This is done through the device of goal adoption — the fact that people put their own resources in the service of other people’s goals. A system B adopts the goal of a system A (Castelfranchi and Parisi 1980) when B begins to be regulated by a goal of A’s (it pursues A’s goal as its own goal), e.g., when B “helps” A to reach A’s goals. Different kinds of adoption are possible: instrumental (I lend you my car so I can avoid accompanying you), social exchange (I lend you my car so you lend me your pied-à-terre), cooperative (I help you to do your home assignment, so we can go to a movie together), altruistic (I dive into the sea to save you), normative (I let you cross the street because the light is red).

In order to have other systems adopt our goals, we may have the sub-goal of influencing them. A system A has the goal of influencing another system B when it has the goal of raising or lowering the likelihood for B to pursue some goal.

Figure 1. Influencing others
The goal of influencing others may be either Ego-centred or Alter-centred. A case of Ego-centred influence is when A’s first goal is to influence B to adopt one of his goals. A command, for instance, is a case of Ego-centred influence. In saying *Please fetch me the newspaper*, I ask you to do some action which is useful to me, not to you. Alter-centred influence occurs when A’s goal is to influence B to pursue one of his goals, but generally one that is an interest of B. Advice (Castelfranchi and Poggi 1990a; Poggi and Pelachaud 2000) is typical of Alter-centred influence. If I say *Take your raincoat: it’s going to rain*, it is for your benefit rather than for mine. In order to influence B, A has to activate goal GA in B’s goal set. But how can A activate a new goal in B’s mind? In general, there are two ways of influencing people — direct influence and goal hooking (Figure1).

4.1 Direct influence

The first way for A to influence B, which I call direct influence, is to directly generate and activate a goal in B. This may be done chemically (for example, through a drug that causes you to do things you would not otherwise do) or by hypnosis or suggestion. This, however, is not the most frequent or particularly interesting case of social influence.

4.2 Goal hooking

The most frequent and pragmatically interesting way of influencing people is goal hooking. In order to have one’s goal GA accepted by B, A has to hook it onto a goal GB that B already has. A must lead B to pursue GA because GA is a useful, or the most useful, or a necessary sub-goal of GB’s, that is, because a means-end relationship holds between GA, the goal A wants B to adopt, and GB, a pre-existing goal of B’s. To the extent that B believes or feels that such a link holds, B is likely to accept GA as a goal of his/her own. In some cases A wants B to generate a goal which is not in conflict with B’s other goals. But sometimes B needs to make a choice, since the goal proposed by A is likely to conflict with another of B’s goals. When this is the case, A has to identify not only one of B’s goals, to which the proposed goal GA may be hooked, but two or more of them. Mere hooking of the proposed goal GA to one of B’s goals is not enough; so A also needs to induce B to a different evaluation of the possible conflicting goals, resulting in a preference for the goal proposed by A. For instance, if politician A wants to convince elector B that it is a preferable goal
to vote for A instead of, say, for C, A will have to recursively apply the hooking principle so as to make him believe, for example, that the proposed goal GA is at the same time useful to B's goals GB1, GB2, and GB3, thus reaching a higher cumulative value.

Of course, on the side of the beliefs represented in the persuader's and the persuadee's minds, this view of persuasion quite obviously implies that A must have a clear "theory of mind" of B. S/he must have beliefs about what B's goals, beliefs, and evaluations are. But, provided A has an adequate representation of B's mind, how can A hook GA to some GB?

B has different kinds of goals to which A can hook GA, some of which may be linked to emotions; thus, there are different kinds of goal hooking. Before examining them, let me overview how emotions and goals can be linked to one another.

4.3 Emotions and goals

According to a goal and belief view of emotions (Castelfranchi 2000; Miceli et al., forthcoming), emotions are linked to goals in at least three ways.

a. Goals are monitored by emotions

There is a functional link between them. Emotions are a biological device monitoring the state of achievement or thwarting of adaptively important goals (Frijda 1986). Thus, fear monitors our goals of survival, safety, physical well-being, anger, the goal of justice (Aristotle 1973; Averill 1982), shame, the goals of image and self-image (Castelfranchi and Poggi 1990b).

b. Goals are triggered by emotions

Emotions are not only caused by goals (functional to goals), they also cause goals. The emotional "syndrome" triggered when an important goal is likely to be achieved or thwarted, in addition to feelings also includes cognitive aspects (beliefs, images, expectations, attributions), physiological and expressive reactions, and the generation of specific goals. This is the motivational aspect of emotions: They have a strong motivating power, in that generally a particular goal is attached to, and triggered by, a particular emotion (Castelfranchi 2000). Fear triggers flight or aggression, shame triggers a desire for apology and submission, compassion triggers a helping behaviour. In this sense, emotion, as an adaptive device and a way to cope with the demands of the environment in a swift and effective way, is more flexible than the device of reflex, but more rigid and less mediated than rational problem solving and logical reasoning. A goal triggered by
an emotion, unlike goals generated by a Goal Generation Rule (Conte and Castelfranchi 1995), has a high priority: It is an “impulse”, a goal to pursue immediately and without too much conscious reflection (see the “peripheral route” of Petty and Cacioppo 1986).3

c. Feeling or not feeling an emotion can itself become a goal
Finally, an emotion not only has a motivating, but also a self-motivating power. As you feel a pleasant emotion, you come to have the goal of feeling it again, while as you feel an unpleasant one, you generally have the goal of not feeling it anymore. A kind of emotion-goal loop is formed, functioning as a learning device. If I feel guilty after shaming someone publicly, I may refrain from shaming people again also in order to no longer feel the unpleasant feeling of guilt.

In sum, biologically adaptive goals generate emotions, but emotions generate two kinds of goals — the goal activated by the emotion and the goal of feeling (or not feeling) that emotion again.

4.4 Types of goal hooking

If A wants to influence B to pursue goal GA, s/he may perform two kinds of goal hooking, namely, “cognitive hooking” and “emotional triggering”.

4.4.1. Cognitive hooking
I define as “cognitive” goal hooking the case in which A hooks his/her goal GA to one of B’s goals by leaning on B’s reasoning and planning, that is, on B’s application of a Goal Generation Rule. A wants B to have GA as a goal in virtue of B’s belief that a means-end relationship holds between GA and GB. Since sometimes the goal of B to which A hooks goal GA is the goal of feeling some emotion, we have two kinds of cognitive hooking — “cognitive hooking to an emotional goal” and “cognitive hooking to a non-emotional goal” (Miceli et al., forthcoming).

4.4.1.1. Cognitive hooking to a non-emotional goal
The sign of a restaurant is a case of “hooking to a non-emotional goal”. If you are hungry and have the goal GB of eating, the sign of A’s restaurant, by informing you that you can eat there, may influence you to do so (GA). In this case A, the restaurant keeper, appeals to B’s planning. B does not have to be particularly fond of Chinese restaurants, or find them nice or curious; he is just hungry now and this is enough for him to stop and eat there.
4.4.1.2. Cognitive hooking to an emotional goal
Suppose that the Chinese restaurant keeper A is very friendly to his client B, so that B feels very comfortable any time he goes to that restaurant. Considering that in A’s restaurant the conditions for being comfortable are fulfilled, B conceives the new goal of being comfortable, besides simply eating, and from this goal automatically generates a sub-goal “B eats at A’s restaurant”, which is precisely the goal A wanted B to pursue!

In “cognitive hooking to an emotional goal” A, generally by first causing B to feel some emotion, activates in B the goal GB of feeling (or not feeling) that emotion again, with respect to which the goal GA proposed by A is a means. This will probably activate the desired goal GA in B.

A particular instance of this is the device of personalisation, often used in the field of commerce, e.g., in advertising, public services, airlines. The user is addressed very directly, by first name, or simply as you, your, and so on. Feeling treated as a person rather than a client or a number is somewhat gratifying; and this makes one more willing to buy or to co-operate.

4.4.2. Emotional triggering
I define as “emotional triggering”, or “hooking to a goal activated by an emotion”, the case where the goal of B to which A hooks GA is not the goal of feeling an emotion, but a goal triggered (activated) by an emotion. In this case of influence, A hooks GA to a goal activated by an emotion, by causing B to feel an emotion that usually triggers the goal GA.

Seduction is a typical case of emotional triggering: I make you fall in love with me (trigger an emotion) in order to get you to do what I want. Other examples are the biological emotion releasers. The babyish features of babies (round, cute face and big eyes) trigger the emotion of tenderness and hence call for protection; dilated pupils, a signal of excitement, automatically trigger pupil dilation and excitement in potential partners; the sad expression of a poor beggar calls for compassion and help. Another case of an emotionally influencing factor is music. Since music has a deep and direct impact on emotional arousal, by inducing emotions it may also trigger the linked goals. Consider the triumphant rhythm of a war march, the empathy called for in rave parties, or satanic rock, or the emotion-inducing effect of the sound track in films (Poggi and Checchi 1998).

Of course, in humans emotions interact with cognitive processes (previous expectancies, causal attributions), and awareness is an important factor in regulating emotions; but in principle, they are still an adaptive device devoted
to triggering immediate reactions to environmental events. I may reason that giving a dime to the little girl beggar induces her parents to make her beg more, and send her away; but an impulse to help has been triggered anyway by her sad face.

4.5 Goal hooking and beliefs

According to Castelfranchi (1996), the way a cognitive agent typically comes to generate or activate new goals is through beliefs. Also goal hooking is mediated by beliefs. In “cognitive hooking” to both emotional and non-emotional goals, B must have beliefs about a possible GA (say, eating in A’s restaurant) and about its means-end relationship to GB (its being valuable to relieve his hunger, or to feel comfortable). But also in “emotional triggering” the person being influenced must assume some beliefs, since, according to the model adopted here (as well as for Aristotle, see Dascal and Gross 1999), emotions are triggered by beliefs — as when, for example, A tells B that C has insulted B, in order to influence B to fight C.

5. Two routes to goal hooking: Communicative vs. non-communicative influence

As we have seen, in hooking (whether the hooked goal is linked to emotions or not), A must cause B to believe that GA is a useful means (or even the only, the best means) for GB. To attain this goal, A has two different routes available — communicative and non-communicative influence (Figure 2).

Communicative influence occurs when A communicates to B that s/he has the goal of influencing him/her, that is, when A has the goal for B to have the goal GA, but also has the goal for B to know that it is A who has that goal. We can speak of non-communicative influence, instead, when A wants B to have some goal but does not want B to know that it is A who wishes it (Grice 1957).

A typical case of non-communicative influence is that of hidden “persuasion” (which I would not call “persuasion” proper) obtained through subliminal perception (Packard 1957). In a film, tachistoscopic images of Coca-cola are projected, inducing the spectators to crave for a Coke during the interval. More generally, manipulation may be seen as a case of non-communicative influence because I typically do what you want without even knowing that it is you who want it.
We can distinguish two types of communicative influence — inducement and conviction. In both cases, A wants B to pursue GA and wants B to know it. But in conviction, B decides to pursue GA because s/he is finally convinced that GA is not only A’s goal, but also a goal of his/her own.

6. Inducement: Threats and promises

Inducement occurs when A aims at hooking a proposed goal GA to one of B’s goals GB (one already active or that can be activated). In addition, however, the means-end relationship between GA and GB is arbitrarily created by A, and A can afford this because an unbalanced power relationship holds between A and B.
B, namely, A has power over B. We can distinguish two kinds of inducement, coercion and allurement.

6.1 Coercion

I call “coercion” a kind of influence based on threat. A case of coercion in this sense holds when the robber A threatens B: Your purse or your life. A is in fact saying: If you want your life saved (goal GB), then you must decide to give me your purse (GA). At this point, B makes GA (the goal “proposed” by A) a goal of his own as a means to pursuing GB (that A assumes B has). But GA is a means to GB only because A has a gun and has the power to shoot B. There is no “intrinsic” means-end relationship between giving you my purse and having my life saved (whereas there might be some, for example, between driving more slowly and saving my life). In the robbery, a means-end relationship is deliberately posited by A through the device of blackmail, typical of a situation of unbalanced power. A has the power of letting B achieve (or preventing B from achieving) GB (life), and he uses this power to have B pursue GA (giving up his purse) as a means to achieve GB. In Castelfranchi’s (1990) terms, A in this case has the power to influence B just because he has power over B, as far as B’s goal GB (having his/her life saved) is concerned.

This is why coercion is influence based on threat. A commits himself to preventing B from achieving B’s goal GB in case B does not accept GA as his/her own goal, and in this way induces B to generate and pursue goal GA.

6.2 Allurement

Another form of inducement, allurement, is mediated by the cognitive structure of the promise. Consider a mother who tells her child: If you do your homework now, I’ll buy you a new video game. The real meaning of if in this case is that of if and only if (Castelfranchi 2003), i.e., of a “conditional promise”. It differs from a threat in that A commits him/herself to favouring (instead of hampering) one of B’s goals, but it is similar to it in two respects. First, also in the mother-child example no intrinsic means-end relationship holds between doing homework and having video games; second, the only fact that may link them is that mother has the power to give or withhold money for the video game. In fact, what allows A to make a conditional promise is that A has some power over B as far as B’s goal GB of having money to buy the new videogame
is concerned. If B had his own money to buy it, the promise could still be a promise, but presumably would not work as an influencing strategy.

Allurement and coercion are two widespread inducement devices, sometimes quite innocent, sometimes less so. Corruption and intimidation, for example, are two cases of inducement. In corruption, A induces B to do some illegal action by promising money or some other reward; in intimidation, A prevents B from doing something that B would have the right to do by threatening harm in case he does.

7. Convincing: Influence through free choice

As we have seen, in inducement A has the power of letting B achieve GB or not, and therefore can afford to hook his proposed goal GA to B’s goal GB, however arbitrary the means-end relationship between GA and GB is. But suppose A wants B to have goal GA but does not want or does not have the power of resorting to inducement: s/he must necessarily cope with the fact that B is an autonomous agent, that is, B is free to choose which goals to pursue. Here, three cases are possible:

1. A strongly wants B to pursue his goal and really can’t bear to take B’s goals into consideration. S/he must, however, cope with the fact that B has some other goals, and might prefer them to GA. So, instead of seeing them as an obstacle to B’s pursuing GA, A may try to exploit them, and take them as an incentive for B to do what A wants. In this case, A hooks GA to B’s goals not because A primarily wants to take B’s goals into account, but because s/he can’t help doing so. In this case, A is somehow compelled to find a link between A’s and B’s goals and this may lead A to find arbitrary links between B’s goals and his/her own in order to achieve GA.

2. An opposite case holds when A would like B to pursue GA, but also wants to treat B as a fully autonomous agent, and is so respectful of B’s free choice that s/he may even forgo influencing B at all.

3. There is a third possibility between 1 and 2: A really wants B to pursue GA, but wants B to do it out of his/her own free will. In this case A does not simply cope with the existence of B’s own goals, but deliberately chooses to take them into account. A aims to influence B by treating B as an autonomous agent.

In which of these cases can we say that A has the goal of persuading B?
In case 2, A is so respectful of B's free will that s/he might hardly try to persuade him/her. Case 3 is, in my view, the best candidate for the notion of persuasion: A does want to influence B, but also wants to take B's goals into account, and this is why s/he hooks goal GA to B's goals, that is, s/he aims to let B believe that GA is a means to GB, and does so in a communicative way, while also communicating to B that s/he is free to pursue GA or not. In case 1, even if A has the communicative goal of hooking A's goal to B's goals, s/he does so not because s/he deliberately aims to respect B's free choice, but because s/he can't help doing so. This may lead A to "force" the means-end links between GA and GB, that is, to assume they are linked even when in fact they are not, thus possibly leading to deceitful persuasion.5

In both cases 1 and 3, if B decides to pursue GA, it is not because something or someone compels B to do so, but because B is convinced that GA is an adequate means for a GB, i.e., for a goal of B's own, a goal coherent with his/her previous goals, and such that B would have chosen to pursue it him/herself (i.e., freely), had s/he assumed it was useful to his/her goals.

In conclusion, we can influence people in a communicative way either through inducement or through conviction. Inducement resorts to the influencer's power over the person who is being influenced, while conviction appeals to that person's free choice (Piattelli Palmarini 1995), and this is persuasion proper.

I call persuasion the case in which A has the goal to influence B by communicatively hooking A's goal to one or more of B's goals, and to do so in such a way as to cope with, or to deliberately take into account, B's free will. The result is that B may ultimately pursue the goal proposed by A not because A compels him/her to, but because s/he freely chooses to do so.6

8. Persuasion

I shall now analyse the concept of persuasion as a case of influence through communicative goal hooking based on the free choice of the person who is being influenced. In persuading, A has the goal of influencing B, that is, of causing B to pursue a goal proposed by A,

a. through the device of goal hooking, that is, by hooking the proposed goal to B's previous goals;
b. in a communicative way, that is, by letting B know that A has the goal of influencing B; and
c. not on the basis of his/her power over B, but on the basis of B’s free choice.

We can therefore say that A persuades B to pursue GA when A causes B to pursue it by convincing B, that is, when A succeeds in making B strongly believe that B is a useful sub-goal to B’s actual goals, which B might also have chosen regardless of A’s influence.

The main goal of the persuader is to make the persuadee pursue some goal, and in order to do this s/he has to hook the proposed goal to one or more of the persuadee’s goals; that is, s/he has to convince him/her that the proposed goal is in a means-end relationship to some of his/her goals. Furthermore, since the goal proposed by the persuader may compete with other possible goals of the persuadee, the persuader may need to activate the proposed goal not only as a possible goal, but as the preferred choice; that is, s/he must cause the persuadee to attribute a high value to the proposed goal. Persuasion means, then, to convince the other that some goal has a high value coefficient.

What I will show in the following sections is that for the persuader to attain this goal, that is, to convince the persuadee that the proposed goal is a highly valuable one, the persuader can use all of the three elements of persuasion already stated by Aristotle (1973): logos, ethos and pathos. Aristotle argued that we are persuaded by three elements in a persuasive discourse: the rational part of discourse (logos), the orator’s character (ethos) and our own passions (pathos). To show how these three elements enter my view of persuasion, let me start with the first aspect of the persuader’s task — convincing.

8.1 To convince: To cause a strong belief

Sometimes we say: “I am convinced that…”; but what does this mean? I define “being convinced” as holding a strong belief about something. Since people believe beliefs to various degrees of certainty, we may say that one is convinced of \( p \) when one believes \( p \) with a high degree of certainty.

According to the model I adopt here (Miceli and Castelfranchi 1994; Castelfranchi and Poggi 1998), the degree of certainty of beliefs is due to at least two factors. On the one hand, it depends on the source of the belief and on the subject’s meta-cognitive evaluation of it. Among the various sources of knowledge — perception, memory, inference, communication — some are generally considered more credible than others. Regarding the source of the belief, all things being equal, I would probably trust a belief acquired through perception more than one merely inferred, and even more than one heard from...
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Yet, regarding the evaluation of the belief, I may trust other people more than myself if I sense, for example, that I am a bit drunk, or if I am not a very self-confident person. The source a belief derives from and its meta-cognitive evaluation determine how credible, how reliable that belief is per se. But another criterion of the reliability of a belief is its relations to all the other beliefs in our mind. Since beliefs in our mind are linked to each other by several kinds of relations (cause-effect, means-end, time, and so forth), the more (reliable) links a belief holds with other reliable beliefs, the firmer that belief and the other linked beliefs, and the higher their respective degrees of certainty. A check of consistency among beliefs is the most important device by which our mind checks the reliability of new beliefs.

The belief that A has to convince B of, in persuading B to pursue GA, is not a belief about some fact, nor even some goal, but a relationship between two goals — the belief that the achievement of a goal causes or makes it possible to achieve another goal — and this cannot be assessed through empirical evidence (if I kick a ball you can say I caused the ball to move, but you saw my foot moving and the ball moving, not the cause-effect link between them!). Thus, basically, there are two ways to make people firmly believe a belief about a cause-effect or a means-end relationship. The first is by showing them that the proposed belief is highly consistent with their previous beliefs, and this is done by showing that cause-effect, means-end, time, space, condition relationships hold between the new belief and the pre-existing ones. This is the device of showing coherence — the logos aspect of persuasion, which is classically the domain of argumentation (Guerini et al. 2003).

There is, however, also another way to induce people to firmly believe that a particular belief is reliable: To notice that it comes from a reliable source, one you can trust (Castelfranchi and Falcone 2000, Falcone and Castelfranchi 2001). So, if I attribute the things I am saying to a very competent and reputable source, they will be more credible. Or, if I am the one stating those things, I must look credible.

To trust a source, that is, to attribute credibility to it, means to attribute to it at least two features — benevolence and competence. I think a source is benevolent when I think that it has the goal of adopting my goals, or at least that it does not have the goal of harming (thwarting my goals). More specifically, in the realm of persuasion, a benevolent source is one that does not thwart the persuadee’s goal of knowing the truth, i.e., that it is a source that is not misleading. On the other hand, I think a source is competent when I think it has the power (it is able to do the actions and possesses the material and cognitive
resources) necessary to achieve its own goals, and specifically the goals it eventually adopts (including mine). A persuader must seem both benevolent and competent; s/he must behave in such a way as to appear as a credible source, in order to enhance the credibility of the beliefs s/he communicates.

This is the aspect of ethos, the persuader’s character in Aristotelian terms (one that usually reaches the persuadee through the “peripheral” route, according to Petty and Cacioppo 1986). One of the persuader’s goals is then Self-presentation: S/he has to present him/herself as a benevolent and competent source. Often, in fact, we believe things not (or not only) because they are rationally demonstrated, but simply because we trust the person who is informing us.

8.2 A highly valuable goal

Now we come to the second part of the persuader’s task, to cause the persuadee to believe that the proposed goal is highly valuable. We have said that the persuader must cause the persuadee to evaluate the proposed goal as worthier than other possible goals. This means that s/he has to find some way to enhance the VC of the proposed goal.

As we have seen, a goal receives its VC from the VCs of the goals it serves: the higher the VC of a super-ordinate goal, the higher that of the subordinate one. So, if the persuader can convince the persuadee that the proposed goal serves a very valuable goal, the VC of the proposed goal is enhanced and hence possibly chosen even against conflicting goals.

What are then the most valuable goals for people? Among the contingent goals of everyday life, some are very valuable for some people but not for others. The good persuader must therefore identify what might be the persuadee’s preferences, predict which goals are most valuable for him/her, and hook his or her proposed goal to them. This is why a persuader must know the persuadee very well, namely, in order to make accurate predictions of his/her preferred goals. If I want you to come to the movies with me and I propose a film by Kubrick, a director you hate, you probably will not come.

There are some goals, however, which are almost universally held to be highly valuable: for instance terminal goals and values (Miceli and Castelfran-chi 1998) such as self-preservation, image and self-image, self-realisation, being loved, being free. And these goals are generally emotionally loaded. When they are at stake some emotion (pathos) tends to be felt.
8.3 The motion of affects

As we have seen, emotions have the biological function of “protecting” the most important goals in our life, so whenever a very important goal is at risk, we feel an unpleasant emotion, while achieving very valuable goals causes pleasant emotions. Moreover, a peculiar learning device is at work in emotion: When a goal of high value is achieved, it is marked by a pleasant emotion. This implies that feeling a pleasant emotion becomes a valuable goal in its turn, so that the value coefficient of the primary goal is even more enhanced (Castelfranchi 2000).

Therefore, if a persuader evokes an emotion in the persuadee, s/he hooks the proposed goal not only to a highly valuable goal — the goal of feeling some pleasant emotion or avoiding an unpleasant one — but also to a very important related goal of the persuadee — the goal “protected” by that emotion. Moreover, emotion has a strong motivating power in that the goal it triggers is not only a very important, but also a particularly urgent and compelling goal, one to pursue immediately and without thinking it over.

Consider the following case from real political life in Italy. A tells his electorate B: If you vote for me, I’ll create one million new jobs (let us call it a UG, a utilitarian goal), a very valuable goal in fact, from a rational point of view. But suppose A adds: If you vote for me, I’ll fight for your freedom (let us call it a EG, an emotional goal). Now, freedom is not simply a very important goal, it is a value — a goal to which emotions are attached since it is not only a contingent goal in life, but one of the goals we usually all have at any given time of our lives. Thus, if A had hooked his proposed goal GA (vote for me) only to UG he would have reached an average goal value. By hooking it to EG, however, he can reach a much higher value.

This is just one example of how pathos contributes to the work of persuasion, and one of the reasons why the motion of affects has been considered an important part of persuasion ever since its highlighting by classical rhetoric (Aristotle 1973; Sillince and Minors 1991; Walton 1992; Carofiglio and de Rosis 2003).

The value of emotional goals is determined by the value of the goals they “protect”, but the high value of an emotional goal may be exploited to enhance the value of other goals. In a sense, then, in persuasion both emotional and non-emotional hooking can be used to influence others.

To sum up, any persuasive act is a communicative act whereby the persuader aims at having the persuadee pursue some goal, and in order to do so relates this goal to the persuadee’s goals. In order to reach this end, within each
The act of persuasion the persuader can make use of all three means of persuasion: *logos* — the strength of the arguments that enhance the credibility of the relationship between the persuader’s and the persuadee’s goals; *ethos* — the persuader’s credibility; and *pathos* — the emotions to which the proposed goal can be related (Figure 3). As argued by Dascal and Gross (1999) and Gross and Dascal (2001), who propose a Gricean reading of Aristotle’s rhetoric, not only rational argumentation (*logos*) but also *pathos* and *ethos* can be considered forms of proof. That is to say, the persuader both through words and their order (style and arrangement) aims to cause some inferences in the persuadee that bring about not only logical reasoning but also emotions and trust in the persuader.
9. Persuasive discourses and conversations

As argued so far, the structure of a persuasive act is as illustrated in Figure 3. The persuader must hook $GA$, the goal s/he proposes, to one or more of the persuadee's goals $GB$, by making $B$ believe, through inference or explicit communication, that there is a means-end link between $GA$ and $GB$. $A$ may achieve this through *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*, that is, by appealing to rational arguments, to $A$'s own credibility and/or to $B$'s emotions. These three strategies can all be pursued, and they are usually intertwined in every persuasive discourse.

But if this is the general structure of persuasion, persuasive acts will differ from one another in the amount of sentences aimed at each particular part of that structure, or in the weight attributed to the different strategies of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. In some cases, it may be useful to assess, for instance, to which of the persuadee's goals the persuader hooks the proposed goal; to compute how much a politician appeals to rational argumentation as opposed to his self-presentation, at different stages in his campaign; to decide what topics should be tackled to make a stronger appeal to emotions; to distinguish when self-presentation is overt from when it is left to be inferred in a subtle way.

To do so one needs to analyse a large amount of persuasive acts in such a way as to take into account both their communicative structure and their content.

These are the very features afforded by an analysis of discourse in terms of hierarchies of goals (Parisi and Castelfranchi 1975). In what follows, I analyse four different persuasive acts in these terms, by showing how this kind of analysis makes it possible: (1) to expose the links between the goals proposed by the persuader and those attributed to the persuadee; (2) to specify which parts of the persuasive act, respectively, pursue the strategies of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*; and (3) to discern whether they do so in a direct or indirect way. The discourse fragments I analyse here are just a sample that shows how this method can be applied in more extensive studies on persuasion.

9.1 Speech acts and their goals

According to the view of communication proposed by Parisi and Castelfranchi, “to produce a sentence for communicating is to perform an action” (Castelfranchi and Parisi 1980: 290). They take up the notions of Speech Act Theory, first proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), and combine them with the idea of the hierarchic structure of action put forth by Miller, Galanter and
Pribram (1960): If a sentence performs an action, and every action has a goal, then also every sentence aims at a goal. Moreover, just as an action may have further goals which are hierarchically super-ordinate to the first, a sentence too may have, beyond its first goal, which is made explicit by the literal meaning of the sentence, one or more super-ordinate goals, called “super-goals”, for which the first goal of the sentence is only a means. According to Castelfranchi and Parisi, the “literal” goal of a sentence is explicitly communicated by its lexicon and syntax, while its possible super-goals are further goals, by definition not explicitly communicated by the sentence, that the speaker may want the hearer to understand by inference. For example, if my colleague asks me “Are you going home?” the literal goal of his sentence is simply to ask me if I am going home, but his super-goal (the goal he might want me to infer) may be to ask for a lift.

9.2 Discourse as a hierarchy of goals

According to Parisi and Castelfranchi (1975), a discourse has the structure of a plan in that it is a sequence of sentences governed by a hierarchy of goals. For all the sentences, the speaker wants the listener not only to understand the single literal meanings, but also to reconstruct inferentially, starting from those literal meanings, a more or less complex hierarchy of super-goals, which all aim to communicate the final goal of the whole discourse. Furthermore, as pointed out by Poggi and Magno Caldognetto (1997), also nonverbal behaviours, such as a gesture, a gaze, a picture, may be, if not speech acts, communicative acts. As such, they may have goals and super-goals, and can constitute, in themselves or in combination with verbal communicative acts, a multimodal discourse, that is, a combination of verbal and nonverbal communicative acts that all aim at a common goal.

10. The analysis of persuasive discourses

The notion of discourse as a hierarchy of goals has been adopted to analyse tales and news, everyday dialogues and conversations, classroom interactions, quarrels, multimodal discourses, comic and dramatic film scenes (Poggi, Panero, and Scotto 2002). It is typically a method for qualitative analysis, since it makes explicit the literal meanings of a discourse’s communicative acts, but also the inferences they induce. It is also, however, an adequate means to assess the
relative weight of the appeal to *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* in a persuasive discourse, as well as their degree of directness.

To analyse a verbal or multimodal discourse in terms of hierarchy of goals (see Figures 4, 6, 7, 8), one segments it into its communicative acts. Then for each act one writes down its literal goal and its super-goals, that is, the inferences it aims at inducing. You then link them through arrows representing means-end relationships. Sometimes a single communicative act aims at a whole chain of super-goals, sometimes the same inference can also be the super-goal of more than one literal goal. Once the entire hierarchy has been represented, you single out the final goal of the whole plan and the goals of the intermediate sub-plans. In a persuasive act, these are generally the goals of appealing to *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. The number of communicative acts that are, respectively, linked to these goals through arrows is a measure of how much the persuader, in that specific act of persuasion, leans on the three forms of persuasion; and the number of levels separating the sentences (literal goals) from those goals is a measure of how indirect the appeal to them is.

In this section I analyse four examples of persuasive acts: an excerpt from a political speech delivered a few days before elections, an advertisement taken from the Yellow Pages, a dialogue between a pharmaceutical agent and a doctor, and one between a nurse and a patient. In this way I aim to show how this procedure could be used to analyse extensive corpora of persuasive acts in terms of the model of persuasion presented in the preceding sections.

10.1 A political discourse

The first item I shall analyse is a persuasive discourse delivered on an Italian TV Channel in 1994. It is taken from the pre-election debate held between Silvio Berlusconi and Achille Occhetto on March 25th, 1994. Berlusconi (presently, the Italian Prime Minister) is the owner of several TV channels and of a billionaire financial business, who in March 1994 became the leader of a new party, “Forza Italia”, confronting the leftist coalition. Achille Occhetto was at that time the leader of PDS, the Left Democratic Party (former Communist party). After this debate, Berlusconi’s coalition won the election and he was Prime Minister for 9 months. The debate was held on the political show “Braccio di ferro”, broadcasted on Channel 5 (one of Berlusconi’s TV channels). The fragment below is taken from Occhetto’s speech and is analysed in terms of its hierarchy of goals. The background events immediately preceding the debate are the following. Just a few days earlier, the clubs supporting Forza Italia
(Berlusconi's party) had been subject to a blitz by the Financial Police, aimed at discovering suspected collusion with the mafia. At that time Berlusconi told a newspaper that a leftist white putsch was being plotted, for election purposes. But then, Berlusconi denied having said that. A similar incident happened with Luciano Violante, an important judge and a member of the Italian Parliament belonging to the PDS party. Violante too said something to the newspapers and then denied it.

Let me remind you that yesterday Berlusconi asked what face I could wear today, at this meeting, given that I was in charge of a plot against Forza Italia. Here I am then, wearing this face (S1). That is, the face of an honest man (S2); and when the other day Berlusconi claimed that the left had supposedly organised a putsch (S3), but then he recanted (S4) (...) I said no more (S5), this is the way serious and fair opponents confront each other (S6). I do not understand why one should accept Berlusconi's recantation (S7), but not that of a gentleman such as Violante (S8) who has fought openly (S9), who is willing to take risks, even putting his own life in peril as Violante has done in confronting the mafia (S9).8

In this fragment, Occhetto says he is presenting himself while wearing this face (Figure 4, Sentence 1), that is, the face of an honest man (S2), thus implying he is an honest man (Goal 4). Then he mentions that Berlusconi had told (S3) the media of a leftist putsch and then recanted (S4), thus implying a double-faced, untrustworthy behaviour on his part (G5). After that, he reminds us that he never publicly commented on this (S5), and says this is the way serious and fair opponents confront each other (S6), thus implying that he is a fair opponent (G6). Finally, he rhetorically says he does not understand why Berlusconi's recantation should be taken seriously (S7), while Violante's recantation should not (S8) — thus insinuating that Berlusconi is not impartial (G7).

Obviously, the super goals G5 and G7, concerning Berlusconi's untrustworthiness and partiality, aim at the further goal G2 of showing that Berlusconi is not fair, while the super-goals G4 and G6, along with Sentence 9, aim at showing Occhetto's and his party's honesty and fairness. Since the final goal of any pre-election discourse is by definition to persuade electors to vote for the speaker, we can say that here the goal proposed by Occhetto (G1, vote for me), that is, the GA he asks electors to adopt, is pursued by soliciting evaluations from the electors — negative evaluations about his opponent (G2) and positive evaluations for himself and his own party (G3). In sum, then, the strategy used by Occhetto in this excerpt does not make an appeal so much to logos, the argumentation about his own political program and about why it would be
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convenient for the electors to vote for him, as it does to ethos, that is, the Self-presentation of the Speaker, his moral rectitude, and the political and moral qualities of the people in his party. See also how Sentence 9 aims at demonstrating that Occhetto’s party is not only morally honest (reliable) but is also capable of an effective political struggle (competent): The two aspects of credibility are, though in different proportions, both present.

The analysis makes it possible to assess how much, and how directly, the speaker appeals to the different strategies. Occhetto pursues primarily an ethos strategy, aimed at raising the electors’ trust in himself and his party, in five out of nine sentences, but in an indirect way, because no sentence of his speech explicitly mentions his reliability.

10.2 An advertisement

Let us turn to a different type of persuasive communication, that of advertising. In fact, the goal structure of any advertising message is always the same: Seller A’s goal is to make a profit, and in order to do this A proposes to Customer B the goal GA of buying the goods or services provided by A. Therefore, A must hook his goal GA to B’s goals GB, that is, he must show B what are B’s goals for which it is convenient to pursue GA, that is, to buy A’s goods or services.

As part of a research project, graphic advertisements from the Yellow Pages and from women’s magazines were analysed (Petitti 1999). The two cases differ in one relevant aspect. If B is looking for a product or a service in the Yellow Pages, she already knows what she is looking for, that is, she already has a clear
goal (a “need” that she feels). However, if B is simply reading a magazine, A has first to catch B’s attention, possibly even to create a need that B did not previously feel. In the former case, then, we have a top-down goal generation. B already has the goal GB of buying some goods or obtaining some service, and A must cause B to choose his — instead of others’ — goods or services. A must cause B to pursue GB through GA, not, for example, through GC or GD as proposed by a rival firm. In the second case, A cannot hook his/her goal GA (to have B buy A’s goods or services) to any goal GB of B, since in B’s mind the goal GB for which GA is a means is not active yet. Therefore A must bottom-up activate B’s GB by making her see that it is possible to pursue GA (to buy A’s goods or services). This would make it possible for B to reach the goal GB, which B certainly must have but is not taking into account at the present time (it is not an active goal of hers).

Although the activation device differs, the hierarchy of goals underlying all advertisements is generally quite similar. The advertisement must, on the one hand, provide non-evaluative information about the advertised goods or services. It should specify its identity (for example, its name), function (what it is for, what are the “utilitarian” goals it may satisfy) and how it can be reached (in which places and shops, and at which addresses it can be found). On the other hand, the advertisement must induce evaluations, aimed in general at having the customer prefer those goods to others. That is, it seeks to comparatively raise the Value Coefficient of the goal of buying specifically that item. In order to accomplish this, the goal of buying those goods (GA) is hooked to very important goals, such as the goals of image, aesthetic goals and so on. An advertisement from the Yellow Pages is shown in Figure 5, while Figure 6 represents its hierarchy of goals.
The analysis displays the relationships between the shop’s features and its products, and the client’s goals.

Sentences 1, 2 and 4, and 3 respectively aim at the goals of providing beliefs about identity, function and how to reach the shop. S1, while specifying the name (identity) also informs about the function. S3 provides the address and S4 describes in greater detail the function of the shop, as does the picture of a dog (2). Sentences 5 through 9 aim at raising the value of the service, since they hook A’s goal GA, of having customers, to a number of customer B’s GB goals. S5 and S6 provide assurance of the dogs’ quality, which increases the attractiveness of that firm against others in relation to B’s Central Goal, to buy a dog. Other sentences aim at increasing the VC of buying puppies here by hooking this goal to utilitarian goals: G10, the goal of free choice, aimed at by the list of three different breeds (S7); and G11, the goal of feeling comfortable, aimed at by S8, a home delivery service. The pictures of four credit cards (9) point out that this method of payment is accepted, which serves both the goal of feeling comfortable (G11) and the goal of safety (G12). This last goal can
also be viewed as using a *pathos* strategy, since it relieves worry showing there's no need for cash transactions, which might involve risk. On the other hand, the pictures of the credit cards (9), but also the cryptic information of the abbreviation FCI (6), which can be understood only by experts, evoke the high exclusiveness and specialisation of the firm (G9); since this provides a further warrant of prestige and specialised competence, they can be viewed as pursuing a strategy of self-presentation (*ethos*).9

10.3 The doctor and the pharmaceutical agent

The third case of persuasive communication is one between a doctor (D) and a pharmaceutical agent (PA). Such agents are professionals who, on behalf of one or more pharmaceutical firms, inform physicians about the composition of drugs sold by their companies, and the procedures and potential complications involved in their use. This is done with the double goal of assuring correct use of the drugs and of influencing the doctor's therapeutic choices.

In a research project (Poggi et al. 2002), the persuasive discourses produced by some pharmaceutical agents in their dialogues with doctors were analysed in terms of hierarchies of goals. In this kind of persuasive discourse, as in advertising, PA must always provide strictly informative beliefs, in order to give the doctor factual information about the proposed drug (PAd), and evaluative beliefs, aimed at influencing the doctor to prefer the proposed drug over those sold by his/her company's competitors X. Both goals are aimed, in turn, at hooking PA's goal GPA1 (to have the doctor prescribe PA's drug PAd) to the doctor's goal GD (to cure his patients well). Yet, among PA's sentences, some use a strategy of *pathos*, that is, they tend to make the doctor feel positive emotions (for example, by gratifying his goal of image, or by being nice to him), while others use an *ethos* strategy, by providing an image of honesty and reliability both of PA himself and of his firm. This is the hierarchy of goals that generally any PA (perhaps any sales-promoting agent) pursues (Figure 7). In addition, each specific PA, in each particular dialogue, emphasises one or the other strategy, on the basis of his personality, of his model of the doctor, and of how the dialogue progresses.

Let us consider more closely, in one of the fragments under analysis, how various sentences address different goals within the goal hierarchy.

In the fragment that follows, PA presents the Doctor with a new medical remedy which is sold through *co-marketing* (that is, placed on the market both by his firm and by a competitor under a different name).
Figure 7. The persuasive dialogue of a pharmaceutical agent

(6) D: This… Prostaril, then, I don’t know it.
PA: You do not know it? (1) Then I’ll immediately show it to you (2) quick (3).
Sinamurosil Monil (4) Do you know it? (5)
D: Yes, oh, is it the same?
PA: Yes, it’s co-marketing (6). Prostaril is the trade mark (7) it’s the alphalytic remedy (8) intended exclusively for benign prostatic hypertrophy IPB (9): Chicago Congress, New Orleans Congress it’s been confirmed that Prostaril is the most effective molecule for the treatment of IPB (10) it operates at the level of the prostate, not that of the vessels (11) two big advantages, first it begins to act immediately with the first dose, then the excellent tolerability and the stability in the effects on blood pressure (12) — you know very well (13) that older alphalytics engendered a few minor problems as concerns blood pressure (14).
In his first remark, with the word *quick* (3), implying he's going to take little time, PA lets the doctor infer that he *looks after* his needs, that is, he respects him: so he satisfies *pathos* goals by gratifying the doctor's image (GPA7). The positive emotions will favourably prepare D to the dialogue by inducing him to adopt the goal proposed by PA more easily, that is, to prescribe the drug of PA's firm (GPA1), thanks to a positive emotion of sympathy of the Doctor towards PA (see the case of the Chinese Restaurant above). By using the word *quick*, the agent adopts an emotional strategy to persuade. The same strategy also informs a part of the PA's second remark, *You know very well* (13): Taking for granted the doctor's competence aims at gratifying his goal of image (GPA7). On the other hand, again in his first remark, by uttering the trade mark (*Monil* (4)) used by the other firm to sell the same product in co-marketing, and by the very acknowledgement *Yes, it's co-marketing* (6), PA aims at showing sincerity in order to be considered as ethically correct and a reliable source (GPA9). In this way he can better convince D that, in order to treat his patients well (GD), prescribing the drug proposed by the PA (GPA1) is an adequate sub-goal. Here he uses a persuasive strategy based on *ethos*.

Every other information in this fragment uses a *logos* strategy. The first set of sentences provides informative beliefs on the proposed drug — name (7), composition (8), function (9), effectiveness (10), functioning (11) — and aims at goal GPA5, to familiarize D with the drug PAd; the other sentences provide evaluative beliefs on PAd (12), and comparatively worse evaluations on competitor drugs (14), aiming at GPA6, to convince D that PAd, the drug proposed by PA, is better than other analogous drugs Xd proposed by other firms.

In another fragment, PA clearly uses an *ethos* strategy. After showing the doctor the advantages of his drug compared to his competitor's through a *logos* strategy, PA argues that they are demonstrated by large scale tests, and tries to increase his own credibility by making reference to a competent source. D, however, cools down his enthusiasm by objecting to the study quoted: *it's a tiny bit partisan*. PA must now recover his own and his firm's credibility by resorting to an *ethos* strategy. He says it is not only his firm who holds the reliability of the quoted studies (*No, easy, it's not partisan because there is research, it's not as if we were saying...*), and shows that the results of the mentioned research are published also by a non-partisan and very prestigious journal (*but then these graphs you find them, you'll find them published in the journal “Tempo Medico”*). Here, PA adopts the *ethos* strategy, so to speak, in a recursive way: First he supports his own credibility with a study carried out by his firm; but since this is not enough to convince the Doctor, he supports the firm's study...
with the reputation of the journal that has published it. Finally, to the accusa-
tion of a partisan view, he counters in an almost scornful manner (*and the
Danieli company does not play tricks*), again implying the ethical correctness of
the firm he belongs to.

From all the dialogues analysed it emerges that PA adopts all three persua-
sive strategies with the same frequency: *pathos* (GPA3, to have D feel positive
emotions), *ethos* (GPA4, to have D believe PA is a credible source) and *logos*
(GPA6, to convince D that drug PAd is better than competitor drugs Xd).

### 10.4 The nurse and the patient

The fourth research study concerns the persuasive discourses of a doctor and
a nurse with four women undergoing their second voluntary abortion (IVG,
Voluntary Pregnancy Interruption). Before this second experience, two wom-
en met with a nurse and the doctor to discuss the operation. The study was
aimed at comparing the different communicative strategies adopted in the dia-
logues by the doctor and the nurse, and their respective persuasive effective-
ness (Poggi et al. 2002). In all the dialogues, the final goal of the doctor or nurse
(O, Health Operator) is to convince the patient P that the goal proposed by O,
to induce P to adopt some contraceptive methods in the future, is a sub-goal to
P’s goals, the goal of preventing undesired pregnancies, and thus to the goal of
avoiding the physical and psychological stress of an abortion (Figure 8).

In these dialogues, as in the previous examples of persuasive discourse, O
may use strategies of *pathos, ethos* and *logos*. For example, the nurse causes the
patient to feel positive emotions by showing her respect, thus causing her to
recover her self-esteem. But she uses an *ethos* strategy as she tells P that even
on TV there are programmes dedicated to contraception: P will be convinced
more easily, since she considers TV a competent source for health information.
Let us see the three strategies at work in some fragments of the dialogue.

(7) O: Do you know that there is a consulting service? (O1)
P: I went there but one had to wait a long time (P1)
O: But it works beautifully (O2) and they have been working on
contraception for 20 years (O3): it’s worth trying (O4); furthermore,
it’s all free (O5).
P: You don’t even need a prescription? (P2)
O: Not even that (O6), you can go there directly or book by phone (O7)
P: Good to know that. (P3) Are you sure they are competent? (P4)
O: I go there myself for my routine checks (O8) and so do other colleagues (O9) I am sure that one or the other of your friends is a patient of ours (O10). In this fragment, O uses *logos* to convince P to go to the consulting service to prevent future pregnancies. To P’s objection to the long wait (P1) O counter-argues that in fact *the consulting service works beautifully* (O2) and that *they have been working on contraception for 20 years* (O3): so she aims at increasing trust in competence of the service, by pointing out the years of experience it has accumulated; then she adds that *it’s all free* (O5), that no prescription is required (O6), and that one can *book by phone* (O7); thus, showing that going to the consulting service has no cost, both money-wise and for its ease, she lets P infer that this goal has only advantages, therefore increasing the VC of that choice for the Patient. The conclusion of these arguments is summarised by the sentence *it’s worth trying* (O4). But in order to persuade the Patient it is still necessary to convince her that the sub-goal proposed (to go to the consulting service) is really useful and effective for the goal of avoiding undesired pregnancies. As mentioned, in fact, it is easier for one to activate a goal if one thinks that the means proposed are adequate and make the attainment of that goal

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**THE HEALTH OPERATOR’S HIERARCHY**

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

*Figure 8. The persuasive dialogue of a health operator*
The goals of persuasion

more likely. This is why to the question P4, *are you sure they are competent?*, O resorts to *ethos*: she supports the credibility of what she’s saying with her personal experience: *I go there myself for my routine checks* (O8). Direct experience is intuitively felt as the best warrant of belief certainty (Castelfranchi and Poggi 1998). But should this prove to be insufficient, O adds the further warrant of inter-subjectivity (*so do other colleagues*, O9), and possibly the experience of someone trusted by P (*I’m sure that one or the other of your friends is a patient of ours*, O10).

The *pathos* strategy appears in various sentences which show an attitude of welcoming and openness toward the patient, as in

(8) O: First some information about the operation then if you want we can talk a bit… what are you worried about?

or in sentences that express empathy, such as O1, O2, O3 in (9):

(9) P: I am afraid of the operation but I do not want a pregnancy; I know I ought not to but… I did everything wrong

O: I understand very well (O1) only we women understand what one experiences (O2)

P: Oh you truly understand me?

O: Yes, I really understand you (O3).

With her sentences O shows she does not appeal to her asymmetric relationship with the patient, by letting her understand that she is like her: in fact, the patient comments with a sentence that consolidates the new balance, asking to confirm whether she really understands her: hence, P feels sympathy for O — a positive emotion that makes the situation more relaxed.

In another fragment O aims at causing positive emotions by inducing P to recover her self-esteem. For instance, in saying *you were not informed well* O lets P infer that if she’s in this unfortunate situation it may not be her fault, she might not have got the right information. This, in addition to discharging her from part of her guilt, may also let her infer that O can indeed give her correct and reliable information.

Other sentences, like *nobody here is judging you or condemning you*, or *people that come here deserve to be respected, not to be judged* aim at not causing, or at de-intensifying, negative emotions like shame or guilt, always present in such cases.

In this case, maybe even more than in other cases, also because of the high emotional charge of an abortion, the arousal of emotions is probably felt as most critical in persuading the patient to adopt contraceptive methods, by both
the nurse and the doctor. Both in fact use a *pathos* strategy in some of their sentences. The difference is that while the nurse, as we have seen, only aims at inducing positive emotions (recovering the patient’s self-esteem and eliciting sympathy to the operator), the doctor in some cases appeals to negative emotions. As he reads that the patient is having her second voluntary abortion, he sarcastically comments: *Oh! Your second time! Congratulations!* One could wonder whether such an attack to P’s self-esteem, that presumably makes her feel even more guilty and humiliated, may be useful to persuade the woman to adopt contraceptive methods, and raises the problem of the non-symmetric role of positive and negative emotions in persuasion (Leventhal 1970; Pratkanis and Aronson 2001), which cannot be dealt with here. Nonetheless, this shows how the appeal to *pathos* is intuitively felt as relevant, and is in fact used even by non-professional persuaders.

To sum up Section 10, the analysis of persuasive discourses in terms of hierarchies of goals makes it possible to elucidate the relationships between the persuader’s and the persuadee’s goals, the varying imports of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* strategies, and the level of directness with which they are pursued.

11. Conclusion

I have presented a model of persuasion in terms of goals and beliefs. I view persuasion as a way to influence a person, that is, to generate new goals or activate old ones, through the device of communicative goal hooking, and particularly through conviction: A persuades B when A, through communication, succeeds in causing B to pursue a goal GA proposed by A. A does so by leading B to believe that GA is the sub-goal of a goal GB of B’s. In order to persuade B, A may use three different strategies: *logos* — arguing why GA is useful to GB, *ethos* — appearing credible and reliable to B, and *pathos* — making B feel emotions that trigger GA or anticipating emotions that would be felt by pursuing it. I have argued that these strategies are usually all at work in verbal and non-verbal persuasive discourses, and I have shown how, in terms of goal hierarchy, an analysis of different kinds of persuasive acts — political discourse, advertising, dialogues in the health domain — clarifies the relationships between the persuader’s and the persuadee’s goals and elucidates how much and how directly the persuader appeals to *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* in his/her discourse.
Notes

* A clarification of my ideas and a substantial improvement from previous versions of this paper are due to the long discussions with Fiorella de Rosis and Maria Miceli during our work on emotional persuasion, and to the insightful comments and helpful suggestions of the Editor of P&C, Marcelo Dascal, and of two anonymous referees.

1. The notions I refer to in the text are drawn from the goal and belief model presented in various books and papers (Castelfranchi and Parisi 1980; Conte and Castelfranchi 1995; Castelfranchi 1990, 1996, 2000; Castelfranchi and Falcone 2000; Falcone and Castelfranchi 2001; Castelfranchi and Poggi 1990a, 1990b, 1998; Miceli and Castelfranchi 1994, 1998). I refer to these notions as they are explicated or indirectly drawn from the above texts but, due to space reasons, I cannot comment or exemplify them at length, nor conceptually compare them to similar notions in social and cognitive psychology.

2. As this list shows, the notions I will refer to in this work range across various domains, from social psychology to action theory, whose literature I cannot deal with in detail here. However, a complex communicative phenomenon such as persuasion cannot be understood without referring to a general theory of action and cognition.

3. Emotion as an adaptive device is phylogenetically more primitive than logical reasoning. Thus, it has the advantage (and the disadvantage) of a faster but less flexible reaction, since it bypasses the tree of choices, whereas logical reasoning allows and requires its careful processing before reacting. This is one of the reasons why an influencer or a persuader who appeals to emotions gives the impression of being somehow unfair, for in the influencee or persuadee emotion tends to lead to an impulsive and unreasoned reaction.

4. The issue of how to state an intrinsic vs. extrinsic link between means and goals is dealt with by Conte and Castelfranchi (1995: Chapter 4).

5. The model of persuasion I am outlining here is viewed from the point of view of the persuader. My hypothesis is that it models the persuasive strategy of a persuader whatever his/her sincerity, that is, whether or not s/he really believes in what s/he is trying to convince the persuadee of. Even if the persuader is deceiving, that is, if s/he does not really believe the means-end links stated, or the arguments provided, the persuader must pursue the goal to convince the persuadee, i.e., to make him/her believe those beliefs.

6. As Marcelo Dascal points out, one could wonder why persuasion should only hook GAs goal to B’s previous goals, and not also generate completely new goals. Of course, this poses the non-trivial question, which I don’t pretend to solve here, whether really nothing new ever happens in our minds. But let me try an answer. On the empirical side, in all the cases of persuasion I have analysed so far, of which the ones examined below are but a small sample, I did not find any cases in which the persuader aims at generating a new goal from scratch in the persuadee. Here, however, I simply want to argue for my hypothesis from a theoretical point of view. Let us take the case of conversion, a case in which a person seemingly comes to have a new goal, one sometimes even opposite to ones held before; and the corresponding persuasive behaviour of proselytism, where a persuader aims at the persuadee’s conversion.
In fact, even conversion does not necessarily imply a completely new goal (Swatos 1998). In some cases the goals that seemingly pop up from scratch are in fact goals that the subject did have before, but ones that s/he was not aware of, or that were not active in him/her. In other cases what changes in the converted person are the beliefs about the means-end links between the sub-goals pursued so far (to believe in god X instead of god Y) and some end-goals (be it the search for inner serenity, belief in a future just reward or punishment of human action, relief from the fear of death) that s/he already had and that are presumably still the same. These assumptions change thanks to a sudden or dramatic process of belief revision, due to whatever reason (a traumatic experience or the slow realisation of new facts), so that the converted person finally comes to believe that the means chosen so far for that goal are not the right ones, and s/he generates new sub-goals. In other words, the sub-goals change, but the final goal does not. In this view, proselytism may be seen as an act of persuasion (a case of persuasive influence, that is, one in which people are induced to conversion not by threat or strength, but by sincere conviction). Thus, the goal of the proselytiser might simply be either to help the pre-existing “sleeping” goal to emerge in the prospective proselytes by making them aware of it, or to cause a belief revision that allows them to generate new sub-goals, but by appealing to a pre-existing higher goal of theirs.

7. Castelfranchi and Poggi (1998) interpret Grice's Principle of Cooperation as a norm of “reciprocal altruism of knowledge”. Since knowledge is a fundamental means to achieve goals for humans, to be benevolent in the domain of communication is to adopt other people's goal of having knowledge.

8. The original text is: “Io voglio ricordare che ieri Berlusconi ha chiesto con che faccia mi sarei presentato oggi a questo incontro dal momento che ero il mandante di un complotto nei confronti di Forza Italia. Eccomi qua, con questa faccia. Cioè con la faccia di una persona onesta e quando l'altro giorno Berlusconi (…) aveva detto che ci sarebbe stato un golpe bianco fatto dalla sinistra ha smontito, io (…) non ho detto una parola così' si comportano degli avversari seri e cavallereschi. Non capisco perché la smentita di Berlusconi doveva essere presa per buona e invece la smentita di un galantuomo che ha combattuto a testa alta, che correrà dei rischi anche della propria vita personale come Violante contro la mafia non e' stata presa per buona”. The fragment I analyse here is divided into numbered communicative acts. The lacking sentences represented by dots in brackets repeat or paraphrase the sentences I have quoted. To find out the hierarchy of goals underlying a discourse, the first step is to segment it into communicative acts, then write them down in sequence (or describe them verbally, in the case of gestures or other nonverbal items), and number them. After representing all communicative acts, to write down for each its super-goal (if it has one), i.e., the inferences that are to be drawn from its literal meaning, with an arrow pointing from the literal meaning to its super-goal: the inferences pointed at by two or more literal acts are the intermediate super-goals of the discourse, and finally, all these intermediate goals point at one and the same goal, the final goal of the hierarchy.

9. At the time of this advertisement, credit cards were not very widespread in Italy since they were viewed as a means of payment only for rich people. This made the shops that accepted them seem particularly up-to-date and prestigious. Of course, this could have the opposite effect of keeping poor people away. It is, however, typically a goal, and often the
communicative goal, of much mass communication: to select a “target”, i.e., a class of prospective persuadees. This means that, before hooking goal GA to B’s goals, A has first to select a specific B as his/her addressee, form a theory of mind of B (particularly, try to figure out what goals that specific B may have), and choose B’s goals GB to which GA may be hooked. In this advertisement, the goals of self-presentation mentioned above may also work as a way of selecting rich people over poor people as a target.

10. The name of drugs and pharmaceutical firms are fictitious.

11. This communicative act, quick, might also be interpreted as an appeal to ethos, i.e., the PA portraying himself as a professional who knows about the tight schedule doctors are on.

References


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