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STRATEGIC USE OF EMOTIONAL TERMS IN ETHICAL ARGUMENTATION ON ABORTION

SIMONA MAZILU

1. *Introduction*

This paper is concerned with the use of emotional terms in ethical argumentation on abortion in an attempt to prove that the emotional or expressive component is a characteristic of this type of argumentation. In texts dealing with the issue of abortion one can notice that expressives represent a recurrent element in the moves exchanged between disputants in the argumentation process. This observation may underlie the hypothesis that expressives are not an accident but an essential component of ethical argumentation on abortion.

This approach to expressives is integrated in the pragma-dialectical theory of *speech acts in argumentative discussions* (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1984) which accounts for argumentation as an *illocutionary act complex*. Therefore, ethical argumentation on abortion is viewed as an exchange of speech acts between the protagonist and the antagonist of a standpoint. This exchange of speech acts may be viewed as a critical discussion supposed to lead to the resolution of the dispute in case. One question to be answered in the analysis is whether expressives are used by disputants for their dialectical potential or for their persuasive effect or for both. The hypothesis underlying this study is that the main function of expressives is rhetorical.

Argumentation from a pragma-dialectical perspective is considered a complex speech act made up of various speech acts specific to each dialectical stage. The ideal model of a critical discussion provides a list of speech acts which includes *assertives*, *directives*, *commissives* and *usage declaratives* to be performed by disputants according to their role in the dispute as either protagonist or antagonist. The pragma-dialectical model views expressive speech acts, "such as congratulations, condolences, and expressions of joy, disappointment, anger, or regret" as communicative acts by means of which the speaker airs his feelings concerning a certain event or state of affairs" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992: 39). Expressives as "expressions" of the speaker's state of mind, emotions or feelings "have no place in a critical discussion" since they "do not lead to any specific commitment that is relevant to resolving the dispute" (*ibidem*). Moreover, "expressives may sometimes be indirect speech acts through which 'primary' speech acts are conveyed that *do* play a part in a critical discussion. In such cases, they should, naturally, be taken into account in the dialectical analysis" (*ibidem*).

If confronted with the ideal model of a critical discussion suggested in the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation, the several texts on the issue of abortion selected for analysis appear to lead to the conclusion that ethical argumentation on abortion abounds in overt and implicit expressive speech acts performed at various points in the discourse in order to gain the audience's adherence to a certain position. So, the high frequency of emotional elements is a characteristic of such instances of ethical argumentation on abortion. The use of expressives undermines the critical character ethical discourse is supposed to have as an argumentative type of discourse.

Disputants make use of various means of conveying and arousing emotions. These means range from the topical potential available for the standpoint at issue to vocabulary, from presentational devices to speech acts. Therefore, the cover term *expressives* will be used for all the elements that convey emotions in a text whether they are topics, lexical elements, stylistic devices or speech acts. The term *topic* (Greek *topos*) needs clarification at this point. From a rhetorical perspective, topics have been defined as "the general heads under which were grouped arguments for a particular subject or occasion" (Corbett 1971: 108). In other words, topics should be viewed as "a 'checklist' of ideas" or "as a stock of general lines of argument" (Corbett 1971: 109) that can be used in developing any subject. The notion of topics is taken over by pragma-dialectics in the form of "*topical potential* [which] associated with a particular dialectical stage can be regarded as the set of relevant alternatives available in that stage of the resolution process" (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002: 139). In this analysis, the term topics will be employed with reference to the different argumentative options disputants have at a particular point to support their position.

The analysis of expressives in what follows starts from the empirical observation that the degree of emotional attachment depends on the standpoint advanced by disputants: *Abortion is a crime / Abortion is not a crime*. Therefore, the standpoint is the key element that determines the choice of dialectical and rhetorical means which best serve the interest of each party in each stage of the dispute. Thus, pro-life advocates conceive of abortion as "an unspeakable crime", "a great moral disorder", "the deliberate killing of an innocent human being" or "a deadly sin" as opposed to pro-choice supporters who call abortion "interruption of pregnancy". The same terminology clash holds for the fetus, too. According to the degree of emotional commitment of the protagonist or the antagonist, the fetus may be viewed as "a human being", "a personal human life" or "an innocent human being" in contrast with "the result of conception", "a newly fertilized ovum", "a newly implanted clump of cells" or "not a person from the moment of conception". Behind these acts of defining abortion and the fetus in a certain manner, there lies the intention of the speaker *to condemn vs to defend* abortion as well as the intended effect upon the audience that is to repent, to feel pity for the fetus or the mother, to stir anger at defenders of abortion, etc. vs not to feel guilty, to have confidence in one's reason, etc.

The expressive speech acts discussed in the paper have been identified in text excerpts illustrating opposing positions on abortion and interpreted as maximally argumentative. As mentioned above, the central claim in this analysis is that the emotional component may

be viewed as an essential characteristic of ethical argumentation on abortion and that expressives are mainly used for their rhetorical potential to gain the audience's adherence to a position.

The analysis is structured in two main parts. The first part is devoted to a presentation of several linguistic means of conveying emotions related to the standpoint *Abortion is a crime* which is further divided into the "hard" anti-abortion perspective and the "soft" anti-abortion perspective. The second part deals with emotions related to the standpoint abortion is not a crime. Topics or argumentative alternatives available to discussants, stylistic devices, speech acts and lexical items are the main means of conveying emotions in this type of argumentation. In both parts, the focus is upon the vocabulary of emotion used by disputants in their argumentative exchange.

2. Means of conveying emotions in ethical argumentation on abortion

This part of the analysis is an attempt at making a classification of the various means of expressing emotion in ethical argumentation on abortion starting from the assumption that the choice made by one party is determined by that party's position towards abortion: abortion is / is not a crime. According to this opposition one may witness *expressions of disapproval* on the one hand and *expressions of approval* on the other hand. Thus, the party holding that abortion is a crime may express in his argumentation the whole range of emotions related to crime such as horror, rage, fear, revenge, punishment, grievance, suffering, pain, blame, torment, remorse, reprobation, etc. All these feelings are stirred by the central element in anti-abortion argumentation – the fetus – which is considered a human being.

The other party maintaining that abortion is not a crime is not expected to make use of emotional terms related to the fetus but to the mother who is considered aggressed by the imposition to carry a child to term against her will. Yet, in their argumentation abortion defenders employ terms deliberately devoid of emotion when referring to the fetus as "result of conception", "newly fertilized ovum" or "newly implanted clump of cells". In defending the anti-abortion or the pro-abortion position the choice of means to communicate emotions has major consequences for the whole process of argumentation and as such for the perception of each type of discourse as a reasonable or unreasonable one.

As stated before, ethical argumentation on abortion is an illocutionary act complex whose communicative dimension resides in arguing in favor or against abortion whereas the interactional dimension consists in convincing the other party of the acceptability or unacceptability of the standpoint abortion is / is not a crime. This illocutionary act complex is made up of various types of speech acts among which expressives occupy a very important place. Disputants' emotions or mental states are "exchanged" by means of expressive speech acts that can be grouped under two major illocutions: *disapprove* in the case of anti-abortion argumentation and *approve* in the case of pro-abortion argumentation. Interestingly, explicit expressions of approval / disapproval and of other mental states derived from them

are rarely used as such. Therefore implicitness seems to be the rule rather than the exception. Moreover, besides its primitive illocutionary force any expressive speech act has several secondary illocutionary forces which are manifested when the act is performed (Vanderveken 1990). Illocutionary forces are carried not only by verbs but also by nouns, adjectives or adverbs which express a particular emotion or state of mind. As concerns the perlocutionary force of these expressives, among the effects they have upon the audience one can mention guilt, remorse, fear, repentance, etc. in the case of anti-abortion argumentation and ease of mind, lack of guilt, relief, etc in the case of pro-abortion argumentation.

2.1 Emotions related to the standpoint *abortion is a crime*

Anti-abortion fighters express their disapproval of abortion by calling it a *crime*. In defending the standpoint *Abortion is a crime* they make use of a wide range of emotional arguments meant to convince a third party of the wrongness of this deed. In broad lines anti-abortion argumentation goes this way: Abortion is a crime because the one killed is an innocent human being. Who are the actors in this scenario? The mother is the murderer, the fetus is the victim. Usually, alongside with the mother other members of the social community such as the father, the family, friends, doctors, nurses, pharmacists or legislators are considered guilty of complicity in abortion. As a matter of fact, abortion is metaphorically conceived of as an act of aggression against life or a threat to life in general. In other words, by abortion, not only the life of an individual but the life of the whole society is menaced. That is why the most appropriate pattern or scheme of argumentation chosen to condemn abortion is that of cause and effect or facts and consequences.

As regards the topics or the lines of argumentation employed to defend their position, anti-abortion fighters manipulate opposing concepts such as good vs evil or life vs death. The audience is provided with two options: either do good by condemning abortion and this way choosing life which is conducive to their happiness or do evil by not taking a stand against abortion and this way choosing death which is conducive to their unhappiness.

The audience is therefore faced with two kinds of emotions: emotions related to the fetus which represents life and emotions related to the mother who represents death. In the category of emotions related to the fetus one may experience pity, sorrow, regret, pain, while in the category of emotions related to the mother there are feelings of rage, revenge, reprobation, blame, torment, compassion, suffering etc. depending on how the mother is seen as either a criminal or a victim of the social environment in which she lives. All these emotions are typical of the anti-abortion argumentation and are communicated by "hard" or by "soft" means. For more specificity, the term "hard" will be used for those instances of argumentation which lay heavy emphasis on the violence of abortion, on the tragic consequences of abortion for the child, the mother and the whole community. This type of "hard" anti-abortion argumentation appeals to the audience's emotions by means of extremely powerful imagery whose function is to reproduce the atrocity of abortion and make the audience repent, fear, pity, etc. at the same time. The term "soft" will be used for those instances of

anti-abortion argumentation which try to move the audience in a moderate manner by means of a mixture of rationality and emotion.

2.1.1 The “hard” perspective

Under the “hard” perspective heading three texts were selected that have certain characteristics in common: *Despre avort, cu Pr. Serafim Man (On Abortion with Father Serafim Man)*, *Mărturii ale unor femei care au făcut avort (Testimonies of Women that have had an Abortion)* and *Scrisoare deschisă adresată dnei Aurora Liiceanu, psiholog (Open Letter to Mrs Aurora Liiceanu, Psychologist)*. These three texts consider abortion as a murder on the basis of the argument that the fetus is a human being. They argue against abortion in terms of facts and consequences pointing out that abortion is not an individual act but an act for which the whole social community is responsible. The question to be answered in the analysis is: What are the specific features of these texts with respect to expressing emotions related to abortion as a crime?

First of all, as instances of the “hard” anti-abortion perspective these fragments may be viewed as parts of a “documentary” on abortion which is not only informative but also instructive. This “documentary” starts with the definition of abortion from a religious perspective and the consequences of abortion for the child and the mother (*On Abortion with Father Serafim Man*). The second text contains the testimonies of two women who had an abortion. These two confessions are meant to have a great impact upon the female audience that could ever think of abortion as a solution to an unwanted pregnancy (*Testimonies of Women that have had an Abortion*). The third part of the “documentary” is an excerpt from a letter written as a reaction to a newspaper article drawing on abortion and family planning (*Open Letter to Mrs Aurora Liiceanu, Psychologist*). This letter presents abortion as a moral problem which generates violence and grave forms of abuse that affect the whole social community.

In what follows, the different types of emotions manipulated in the three texts will be grouped into several categories according to the effect they may have upon the audience.

(1) Abortion is a double murder: first, against God who created that being, and then against that soul which, not being united with Christ by the the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, will be deprived of God’s Glory, remaining in a dark place until Judgement Day when, by God’s mercy, it is saved. But, on the woman there lies a great deadly sin. Abortion is one of the greatest sins which brings about God’s wrath on us all, and for a woman dying while having an abortion is similar to committing suicide and according to the Church Fathers, the Church is not allowed to pray for her soul, this being a sin against the Holy Ghost. Abortion is a revolting sin and brings about God’s punishment both in this life and especially after death. The immediate punishment is sometimes, even death; and later the impossibility of giving birth to other children, diseases on the other children or on parents, conflicts between hus-

band and wife and other forms of punishment. Sinful are also those who urge the woman to have an abortion – husbands, mothers, friends, as well as those who perform the abortion – doctors, nurses or pharmacists who provide contraceptives. (my translation)

Despre avort, cu Pr. Serafim Man (On Abortion with Father Serafim Man, www.avort.ro)

Regarding the emotional vocabulary used by the protagonist one can notice in excerpt (1) a mixture of terms related to the notion of *crime* and religious terms related to the notion of *punishment* supporting the argumentative scheme of cause and effect, or facts and consequences, mentioned before. This instance of argumentation seems mainly aimed at: A) a religious audience whose belief that abortion is a crime is once more reinforced; B) an indefinite audience whose belief is that *Abortion is not a crime*. Thus, terms like *crime, dark place, frightful, great sins, deadly sin, revolting sin, punishment, death, diseases, conflicts* are employed to stir fear. In other words, faced with such nightmarish imagery the audience is made aware of what abortion represents as well as of its consequences. Moreover, religious terms such as *God, Christ, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, God's glory, Judgement Day, God's mercy, God's punishment, God's rage, the Church, the Church Fathers, the Holy Spirit, prayers* are meant to strengthen the emotional value of the first category of terms. Abortion is presented as such a grave act that only God can punish it accordingly. At the same time, these religious terms represent expressions of the protagonist's religious authority or *ethos* as a priest. Therefore his argumentation is supposed to enjoy the highest credibility before the audience. In a persuasive message as the text in point the mixture of concrete and abstract terms is not accidental. It creates what Kinneavy (1971) calls "persuasive clarity" which is quite different from clarity in scientific or informative terms. The audience is made to believe it has "a clear picture of reality" when in fact it is provided with a screened or filtered view of the reality.

The use of emotional vocabulary may thus be seen as subordinated to the major purpose of the argumentative text which is to convince the audience of the wrongness of abortion. Put simply, the expressive component of the protagonist's argumentation represents a persuasive device intended to have a psychological effect upon the audience.

The testimonies of two women who had an abortion can be viewed as another instance of the "documentary" from the "hard" anti-abortion perspective. The two testimonies are extracted from a leaflet called "Sarcină nedorită?" (Unwanted Pregnancy?) that the Christian-Orthodox Association "Pro-Vita" circulated a few years ago to persuade women to choose other solutions to an unwanted pregnancy than having an abortion. The two fragments were excerpted from texts which can be regarded as a confirmation of the "reality" of abortion and its consequences as presented in excerpt (1) above. The testimonies are the following:

(2) I have aborted my child. Together with him a part of me died too, a part that can no longer rise to life. Today I wouldn't take such a decision, no mat-

ter what the people around me might say. I live with a fear inside I can no longer escape. I have nightmares in which a little girl is running towards me with open arms and keeps asking me: “Why mummy? Why?” [...]. I tell this story for all women’s benefit. Consider well what you are doing because your dreams will torture you and you’ll be haunted by the eyes of those who are no longer alive [...]. (Judith) (my translation)

“Sarcină nedorită?”, Leaflet of the Christian-Orthodox Association “Pro-Vita”

(3) Why did nobody tell me what would follow? All those who advised me to have an abortion two years ago – the doctor, the counsellor, my parents, my friends and my husband – assured me that it was the best thing for me and my child! Now my child is dead and I’m desperate! I can no longer sleep at night, I can no longer laugh. Nobody understands me! Please, tell everybody how awful an abortion is. Terrible pains torture my body and soul. (Jutta) (my translation)

“Sarcină nedorită?”, Leaflet of the Christian-Orthodox Association “Pro-Vita”

The two fragments are not in themselves argumentative texts. They can be interpreted as maximally argumentative for the sake of this analysis to reveal that in fact they (can well) function as arguments within the anti-abortion argumentation promoted in the leaflet. After a brief presentation of abortion and its effects, the testimonies are strategically placed at the end of the leaflet text because they are meant to be perceived as strong arguments. Since they represent the personal experiences of two women supposed to exist in reality, the testimonies have a greater psychological impact upon the reader or the audience than any other impersonal discourse against abortion. So, the two quoted stories represent emotional arguments by means of which the audience’s persuasion is aimed at.

The vocabulary of the two testimonies is another means by which emotions are manipulated. As instances of expressive discourse the two confessions focus on the “self” and its relation with the world. Thus, what we expect to find in this case is the female “self” expressing feelings and emotions induced by a painful experience before a female audience that should be convinced of the wrongness of abortion. Therefore, there are terms which express psychological states such as fear (“I live with a fear inside”), suffering (“I have nightmares”, “I can no longer sleep at night”, “I can no longer laugh”), torment (“your dreams will torture you and you will be haunted”), remorse (“Today I wouldn’t take such a decision”), despair (“I am desperate”) as well as physical suffering (“Terrible pains torture my body and soul”). The frightening imagery of abortion is suggested by nouns like *fear*, *nightmares*, *pains*, verbs like *torment*, *haunt*, descriptive adjectives like *desperate* and evaluative adjectives like *awful* and *terrible*. The emotional impact of such words is even greater since they are directly chosen by the speaking subject who makes a confession. Moreover, the degree of credibility of the two testimonies before the audience is higher as people tend to be more easily persuaded by first person stories or even to recognize themselves in other people’s experiences.

The next text for analysis under the “hard” anti-abortion perspective is an excerpt from an open letter written as a reaction to a women magazine article on abortion as a “necessary evil” and on family planning as a “great gain of humanity”:

(4) I believe that abortion should be viewed as a moral issue that has to do also with the healing of people’s psychology. The savage violence directed against children and against other vulnerable creatures, the violence that we witness every evening on TV, is the same violence directed against unborn children. The abuse of the already born children will continue as long as the violence against children in their mothers’ wombs is tolerated, even, legalized or considered a necessary evil, etc. The abuse of women will continue at least as long as there are forms of extreme violence, such as the abuse of the unborn children. Abortion has become a daily crime in which not only the mother but also the entire family, the father, the other children, the grandparents participate. You, as a psychologist, have all the necessary instruments to reveal all the lies that cover such a tragedy. (my translation)

Larisa Iftimie, Open Letter to Mrs Aurora Liiceanu, psychologist,
File Provita Media no.72, August 2004, www.avort.ro

If the first two parts of the anti-abortion “documentary” promote the image of abortion as a “deadly sin” – excerpt (1) – or as a painful personal experience – excerpts (2) and (3) –, the final part presents abortion as an act of extreme violence. The protagonist strategically chooses to deal with *violence* since it seems to be a form of life nowadays to which people have grown more and more accustomed. As she states, we are permanently “entertained” with violence whether we talk about violence against children, women or any other vulnerable creatures. So, the emotions manipulated in the passage are related to the concept of violence and its effects upon the audience.

As noticed above, lexical choice is a strategy to communicate and stir emotions at the same time. It should be again emphasized that not all the terms chosen to present abortion as an act of violence are emotional as such. Their emotional value may be determined by the context, in other words they represent terms that acquire emotional value in the context. The key terms of the passage are *violence* and *abuse* whose emotional content is intensified by the use of descriptive adjectives. Thus, structures like *savage* or *extreme violence* as opposed to *vulnerable creatures* are meant to arouse the reader’s pity for the innocent victims of any form of abuse as well as his/her indignation at abortion. Of great psychological effect is also the correlation between structures like *the abuse of unborn children*, *the abuse of already born children* and *the abuse of women* suggests the fact that abortion affects directly or indirectly a large number of individuals. In addition, terms such as *crime* determined by the frequency adjective *daily*, terms like *lie* and *tragedy* and the use of the passives *will be tolerated*, *legalized* or *considered a necessary evil* with a negative connotation show that abortion is an act of violence performed on a large scale and with the participation of the whole society. All these terms create the same image of a sphere of aggression dealt with in the analyses of the previous text excerpts.

2.1.2 The “soft” perspective

If from the “hard” perspective abortion was treated as a crime, from the “soft” perspective it is considered an infringement of rights. The “soft” anti-abortion perspective can be illustrated by means of an excerpt from Dr. Sam Vaknin’s article *The Aborted Contract and the Right to Life*. The author draws on the relation mother-fetus as a contract which is broken when abortion is performed.

(5) When a woman engages in voluntary sex, does not use contraceptives and gets pregnant – one can say that she signed a contract with her fetus. [...] The contract between a mother and her fetus is derived from the larger Social Contract. Society – through its apparatuses – stands for the embryo the same way that it represents minors, the mentally retarded, and the insane. Society steps in – and has the recognized right and moral obligation to do so – whenever the powers of the parties to a contract (implicit or explicit) are not balanced. It protects small citizens from big monopolies, the physically weak from the thug, the tiny opposition from the mighty administration, the barely surviving radio station from the claws of the devouring state mechanism. It also has the right and obligation to intervene, intercede and represent the unconscious: this is why euthanasia is absolutely forbidden without the consent of the dying person. There is not much difference between the embryo and the comatose.

Dr. Sam Vaknin, *The Aborted Contract and the Right to Life*,
<http://samvak.tripod.com/abort.html>

The protagonist argues against abortion starting from the premise that the mother-fetus relationship is a contract between two parties that are supposed to have equal rights. Yet, when the mother decides to have an abortion, she infringes the fetus’s right to life. The mother is endowed with consciousness or power to decide while the fetus lacks consciousness and thus cannot exercise his/her will. Therefore, one party’s rights prove stronger than the other party’s rights. The resolution of this conflict of rights is one of the major responsibilities of Society. As the author upholds, Society has the right and obligation to defend the weak party’s interests. These are in broad lines the main ideas Vaknin puts forward in his argumentation.

Regarding the lexical choice appropriate to the types of topics employed we can notice a mixture of concrete and abstract terms by means of which emotions related to abortion as an abuse of human rights are manipulated. The protagonist combines *legal terms* (*contract, sign, Social Contract, apparatuses, stand for, minors, insane, right, obligation, parties, citizens, monopolies, administration, state mechanism, protect, intervene, intercede, represent*) with *qualifying terms* of the ordinary language (*small, big, tiny, mighty, barely surviving, devouring*). This combination of terms is *strategic* – or a strategic manoeuvre, according to recent developments in the pragma-dialectical theory – in that it results in a very persuasive appeal to the audience’s sense of citizenship. The manoeuvre is achieved by use of terms lacking emo-

tional content, i.e. whose fundamental meaning is completely deprived of emotional value (most of the legal terms mentioned above), in a context where terms such as *fetus*, *mother*, *embryo*, *minors*, *the mentally retarded*, *the insane* can be emotionally valued. The semantic association of the (scientific) paradigm *fetus*, *embryo* with the (legal) paradigm *minors*, *the mentally retarded*, *the insane* allows the transfer of the characteristics of the latter to the former and thus directs the audience to a representation of the act of abortion as an infringement of law.

The use of this mixture of legal and common terms creates an impression of emotional involvement and at the same time of objectivity from the protagonist's side. He can be viewed both as a detached social analyst and an ordinary citizen who needs Society's protection. Vaknin's language suggests two dimensions of the issue of abortion: on the one hand the dimension of "rationality" and on the other hand the dimension of "aggression". Abortion represents an abuse of the embryo's right to life and therefore a form of aggression that needs to be addressed by Society in the same rational manner used for other forms of social abuse. The word *thug* used instead of *the physically strong* as opposed to *the physically weak* is strategically chosen to convey the idea of aggression the weak party is subjected to by the strong one.

2.2 Emotions related to the standpoint *abortion is not a crime*

Abortion defenders express their approval of abortion by defending the standpoint *Abortion is not a crime*. Broadly, pro-abortion discourse puts forth the argument that *The fetus is not a human being*. If anti-abortion argumentation focuses upon the fetus's right to life, pro-abortion argumentation concentrates upon the mother's right to choose. The abortion scenario is modified so that the mother plays the part of the victim while the fetus stands for the aggressor. Therefore, abortion defenders are expected to use emotional arguments related to the mother. Since she is viewed as a victim, abortion is presented as the right thing to do to remove the "source" of aggression. So, in defending the standpoint abortion is not a crime, protagonists attempt to convince the audience of the rightness of abortion.

The following fragment – excerpted from an article drawing on the mother's right to self-defense – illustrates this perspective:

(6) I think that the premise is false, that the fetus is not a person from the moment of conception. A newly fertilized ovum, a newly implanted clump of cells, is no more a person than an acorn is an oak tree. [...] I should perhaps stop to say explicitly that I am not claiming that people have a right to do anything whatever to save their lives. I think, rather, that there are drastic limits to the right of self-defense. If someone threatens you with death unless you torture someone else to death, I think you have not the right, even to save your life, to do so. But the case under consideration here is very different. In our case there are only two people involved, one whose life is threatened, and one who threatens it. Both are innocent: the one who is threatened is not

threatened because of any fault, the one who threatens does not threaten because of any fault. For this reason we may feel that we bystanders cannot intervene. But the person threatened can.

Judith Jarvis Thomson, A Defense of Abortion in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 1, Fall, pp. 47-66.

Starting from the premise that the fetus is not a person from the moment of conception, the protagonist tries to argue in favour of the mother's right to abortion. The main argument advanced is the following: the mother's life is threatened by the fetus. Although neither of them can be blamed for this situation, the mother has the right to intervene to put an end to it. In order to defend her position convincingly, Thomson resorts to certain elements such as topics or particular lines of arguments, lexical choice, stylistic devices and speech acts by means of which emotions related to the mother as a victim are manipulated.

As regards lexical choice, several terms are used which are suggestive of the same sphere of *aggression*. However, the major difference is that the object of aggression is no longer the fetus but the mother and, thus, the one whose rights are emphasized is not the fetus but again the mother. The vocabulary of Thomson's argumentation is not emotional as such but contextually emotional. *Right* and *threaten* are the key terms of the excerpt which in combination with other terms such as *life*, *death*, *self-defense*, *fault*, *person*, *save*, *innocent* bear an emotional burden.

These terms express the protagonist's emotional attachment to the aggressed mother. The intended effect is to make the audience feel sympathetic to the mother and therefore perceive abortion as an act of self-defense and not as a crime. The interplay between *threaten* in the passive and *threaten* in the active ("one whose life is threatened, and one who threatens it", "the one who is threatened is not threatened [...], the one who threatens does not threaten because of any fault", "But the person threatened can") is extremely effective in suggesting the power relation between the two parties, the aggressor and the aggressed. The use of the modal verb *can* both in the affirmative and the negative forms with the meaning *be allowed to* ("For this reason we may feel that we bystanders cannot intervene. But the person threatened can") points out the fact that the mother is the only one that can decide what to do with the aggressor.

As regards reference to the fetus, "intentionally unemotional" terms are used in the excerpt such as *a newly fertilized ovum* or *a newly implanted clump of cells*. By these terms the fetus is placed in opposition with the mother who is a person. Surprisingly, the protagonist labels both the aggressed and the aggressor as *innocent people*. However, the mother is perceived as more of a "person" than the fetus is.

3. Conclusions

The analysis of the several text excerpts illustrating treatment of the standpoints *Abortion is a crime* and *Abortion is not a crime* in point of expression of emotions, reveals that ex-

pressives represent an essential characteristic of ethical discourse on abortion. This characteristic could be extended to other instances of ethical discourse dealing with a moral dilemma of the *good vs evil* type. In other words, the hypothesis that expressives are not an accident but a fundamental component of ethical argumentation has been confirmed.

Whether we talk about the “hard” or the “soft” anti-abortion perspective or the pro-abortion perspective, emotions are conveyed by similar means such as topics, vocabulary, stylistic devices and overt or implicit speech acts. Therefore, the emotional appeal present in the excerpts dealt with can be viewed as a very powerful strategy of winning the argument. The main function of expressives in ethical argumentation is a rhetorical one. As stated in the ideal model of a critical discussion and as confirmed by the present analysis expressives do not contribute to the resolution of a dispute yet, they are used to gain the audience’s adherence to a standpoint.

Ethical argumentation on abortion may be considered an instance of critical discourse because of the difference of opinion externalized in the confrontation between the protagonist and the antagonist. However, the disputants’ rhetorical objective to win the argument by appealing to the audience’s emotions overweighs their dialectical objective to solve the difference of opinion. This type of argumentation does not conform to the critical standard of reasonableness and, so, the disputants can hardly be regarded as reasonable ones.*

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