THE USE OF ANALOGY IN PRO-LIFE ARGUMENTATION

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Abstract: The paper[1] is concerned with how analogy is strategically used in pro-life argumentation on abortion. Pragma-dialectics (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992) offers a set of critical questions by means of which I will evaluate the use of the argumentation based on a relation of analogy in terms of dialectical soundness. Examining various pro-life texts, I have noticed that the analogies employed remain unexplained. Therefore, despite the apparent similarities between abortion and the German holocaust or slavery, for instance, there are essential differences which are not mentioned. I claim that these analogies mainly have a rhetorical function, to operate what has been called by Micheli (2007: 960) "a transfer of emotional consensus".

Keywords: abortion, analogy, pro-life argumentation, dialectical soundness, persuasion

1. Introduction

The abortion debate has been treated as a case of *deep disagreement* (Fogelin 1985) in which the arguers hold incommensurable positions on the status of the fetus and hence on the significance of abortion. As the parties cannot solve the dispute by rational means, they switch to persuasion directed at a third party, the audience (Mazilu 2008, 2009b), whose adherence to a pro-life or a pro-choice position is sought. Both parties make use of **strategic maneuvering** (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002) aimed more at winning the dispute in their favor by gaining the audience's adherence and less at resolving the difference of opinion on the merits (Mazilu 2009a).

Defining the fetus as a human being from the moment of conception and abortion as murder, pro-lifers try to influence the audience's perception of the reality of abortion by appealing to their emotions. The use of analogy between abortion and events which are strongly disapproved of by the audience is one of the main persuasion tactics intended to move the audience.

In this paper I deal with the role and functioning of analogies in pro-life discourse. A cursory examination of pro-life argumentation reveals that analogy is the main argumentative scheme by means of which pro-lifers make abortion look similar to slavery, the German holocaust, abuses or terrorist attacks aiming to transfer the feelings of disapprobation these events have already stirred in the audience to the domain of abortion. Therefore the aborted fetuses are compared to slaves, to Jews, to victims of daily physical abuses or to victims of terrorist attacks. Although at first sight these analogies seem reasonable, at a closer look one may find crucial differences between the terms compared which are omitted.

From the pragma-dialectical perspective (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992), the existence of essential dissimilarities between the terms of an analogy which remain

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unmentioned proves that the respective analogy is fallacious. By applying the pragma-dialectical critical test which enables one to identify the flaws in the use of an analogy, I intend to evaluate the analogies in pro-life argumentation in terms of dialectical soundness focusing on the dissimilarities between the terms compared. I hold that these analogies function as rhetorical tools that can influence an audience by transferring their feelings of disapprobation from one domain to another.

The paper is structured as follows: section 2 roughly sketches some theoretical aspects related to analogy and section 3 is devoted to the analysis and evaluation of analogies in some pro-life argumentative texts.

2. Theoretical framework

According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), analogy is a resemblance of structures of the type A is to B as C is to D. A and B together, the terms to which the conclusion relates are called the **theme**; C and D together, the terms that support the argument are called the **phoros**. The phoros is better known than the theme of which it should clarify the structure or establish the value. It is important that the theme and the phoros belong to different spheres in order to have a genuine relation of analogy. Otherwise, if the theme and phoros belong to the same domain, we talk about argument by example or illustration (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969: 372-373).

From a rhetorical perspective, analogies are considered vulnerable "when they concentrate on irrelevant, inconsequential similarities between two situations and overlook pertinent, significant dissimilarities. [...] an analogy never proves anything; at best, it persuades someone on the grounds of probability. It is the degree of probability that will be susceptible to challenge" (Corbett 1971: 90).

From the pragma-dialectical perspective, in argumentation based on a relation of analogy "the acceptability of the premises is transferred to the conclusion by making it understood that there is a relation of analogy between what is stated in the argument and what is stated in the standpoint" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 97)[2]. A relation of analogy may be expressed as " 'X is comparable to Y', 'X corresponds to Y' and 'X is just like Y' " (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 99). Pragma-dialectics proposes a set of critical questions which enable the analyst to test the soundness of the use of the argumentation based on a relation of analogy: "Is the situation to which the present case is compared indeed correctly described? Does it really resemble the present case? Or are

[2] Pragma-dialectics makes a distinction between three different types of argumentation each characterized by a category of argumentative scheme (conventionalized ways of expressing the relation between what is stated in the argument and what is stated in the standpoint): symptomatic argumentation, argumentation from analogy and causal argumentation. Symptomatic argumentation relies on an argumentation scheme which expresses a relation of concomitance between what is stated in the argument and what is stated in the standpoint. The standardized expressions indicating a relation of concomitance are: "X is characteristic of Y", "X is typical of Y" or X's are essentially Y". Causal argumentation is based on an argumentative scheme which expresses a relation of causality between the argument and the standpoint. The indicators of a relation of causality are: "X leads to Y", "X is a means of getting Y" or Y results from X" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 96-99).

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there crucial differences between them?" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 102). If the critical questions can be adequately answered, then the argument from analogy has been properly used. The argument from analogy is incorrectly used and represents a **fallacy of false analogy** if the comparison is defective. In this case rule 7 (the argument scheme rule) for a critical discussion has been violated*: "A party may not regard a standpoint as conclusively defended if the defense does not take place by means of an appropriate argumentation scheme that is correctly applied"* (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 159) [emphasis in the original].

As far as the emotional potential of analogy is concerned, Plantin (2004) claims that, when speakers argue emotions and verbally construct a situation, they underline the latter's similarities with other situations which are known to be emotionally relevant within a particular culture. An event "provokes emotions if it can be linked with domains that are socially or personally connected with emotions" (p. 271).

In line with these authors, I hold that in actual argumentation very few instances of analogy pass the pragma-dialectical critical test. However, despite their vulnerability which arises from a fallacious use, analogies are exploited for their great rhetorical potential to easily persuade an audience by creating parallels between old and new situations or events.

3. Analogies in pro-life argumentation

In this section I will analyze and critically test the use of analogy in various instances of pro-life argumentation. Generally, pro-lifers found their argumentation against abortion on the premise that the fetus is incontestably a human being from the moment of conception and therefore abortion is viewed as murder. On the basis of this premise the analogies between abortion and other events which have caused the loss of human lives such as slavery, the German holocaust, terrorist attacks or other violent acts seem legitimate.

Nevertheless, the pro-choice opponents hold that this very premise which is in fact the bone of contention in the abortion dispute needs to be proved. Thus, from a pro-choice perspective, these analogies are unfounded unless the premise that the fetus is a human being is taken for granted. Neither adopting a pro-life nor a pro-choice stance I will try to identify the flaws in the pro-life analogies focusing on the dissimilarities between abortion and the events to which it is compared.

In the first excerpt to be analyzed the official position of the Catholic Church on the issue of abortion is put forward.

(1) Among all the crimes which can be committed against life, procured abortion has characteristics making it particularly serious and deplorable. The Second Vatican Council defines abortion, together with infanticide, as an "unspeakable crime" (John Paul II 1995)

The protagonist, John Paul II, strategically combines two argumentative schemes to defend his standpoint that abortion is a crime: one based on a symptomatic relationship

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and the other one based on a relationship of analogy. By means of the first argumentative scheme, the pro-life arguer states that abortion has the characteristics of a crime committed against life being qualified as "particularly serious and deplorable". By means of the second argumentative scheme, abortion and infanticide are put on a par being defined as "unspeakable" crimes. Interestingly, the analogy between the two notions is not explicitly introduced by a recognizable indicator of the type "Abortion is **like** infanticide" or "Abortion is **similar** to infanticide". The expression "together with" is intended to have a much stronger impact on the audience as it makes the resemblance between abortion and infanticide be taken as an indisputable fact.

Reconstructing the terms of the analogy, one can identify the following relationship: "Infanticide is the killing of a baby / child and it is an unspeakable crime. Abortion is like infanticide because it kills babies, which makes of it an unspeakable crime, too". By this analogy the aborted fetus and the child that is murdered are made to look similar. In Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's (1969) terms, the term "infanticide" is the phoros (what is better known) while the term "abortion" is the theme (whose value should be established having the phoros as a point of reference).

In order to test the dialectical soundness of the analogy between abortion and infanticide, the following pragma-dialectical critical questions can be asked: "Does abortion really resemble infanticide? Or are there crucial differences between them?" To my mind, one essential difference between the terms of this analogy resides in the status of the entity eliminated by abortion / by infanticide. Is an embryo / a fetus in the first trimester of pregnancy (0-12 weeks when abortion is legally permissible) similar to a born child in point of moral status? From the pro-life perspective, both an embryo / a fetus and a born child should be viewed as persons. However, appealing to facts of legal usage, personhood has been considered an attribute of born human beings and not of the unborn. This distinction explains why infanticide has been legally punished as murder while abortion is legally permissible within the first trimester of pregnancy. Therefore we may say that there is a significant difference between an embryo / a fetus and a child, which makes the analogy between abortion and infanticide to be an untenable one. As the pragma-dialectical critical questions cannot be adequately answered, the argument from analogy has been inappropriately used so it may be evaluated as dialectically unsound (rule 7 for a critical discussion has been violated).

However, from a rhetorical point of view, the analogy between abortion and infanticide may have the intended effect of transferring the audience's negative feelings towards infanticide to the issue of abortion on the grounds that the entity eliminated by abortion may be a child.

The second text I am going to discuss is an excerpt from an open letter written as a reaction to a women magazine article on abortion which is called a "necessary evil" and on family planning viewed as a "great gain of humanity".

(2) 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

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> abuse of women will continue at least as long as there are forms of extreme violence, such as the abuse of the unborn children (Iftimie n.d.). [my translation]

The pro-life protagonist in this case uses a combination of argumentation based on a relation of analogy and argumentation based on a cause-effect relation to support the standpoint that abortion is morally impermissible. By means of the first type of argumentation, which is explicitly signaled by the presence of the analogy indicator "same", abortion is made similar to other acts of violence whose victims are defenseless creatures. The term "fetus" is strategically replaced by the term "unborn child" in order to show that there is no difference in point of moral status between an unborn and a born child. By means of cause and effect argumentation, abortion or, as the pro-life arguer calls it, "the abuse of the unborn children" is viewed as the primary cause of other forms of abuse or of violence that affect the whole society and to which people have become immune.

The dialectical soundness of the use of the two argumentative schemes employed by the pro-life arguer may be tested by asking the following questions: "Is the violence towards children or women similar to the violence directed against fetuses when an abortion is committed? Or are there significant differences between the situations compared?" (for the argumentation based on a relation of analogy); "Is really the practice of abortion conducive to other forms of violence? Or are there other causes which may be responsible for these effects?" (for the argumentation based on a cause-effect relation).

Concerning the analogy between abortion and other forms of violence, the main difference between the two terms resides in the "object" of aggression. As stated before, there is a significant difference between an embryo / a fetus and a born human being in point of personhood and hence of rights, which makes "the aggression" towards an embryo / a fetus differ from an act of violence directed against a born human being. Therefore I consider that the pro-life protagonist uses the argument from analogy incorrectly thus committing the fallacy of false analogy by violating rule 7 for a critical discussion.

As regards the causal relationship between abortion and other forms of violence, the major problem that I have identified is that it is not clear how the practice of abortion determines other abuses. Abuses of children or women occur regardless of whether abortion is legalized or not. There are other causes such as poor education, poverty or the lack of protective institutions which may influence the existence of these abuses. In my view, the pro-life arguer's speculation on the negative consequences of abortion has been exaggerated resulting in a slippery slope fallacy[3].

Despite their dialectical unsoundness, rhetorically, both the argument from analogy and the argument from consequence employed by the pro-life protagonist may facilitate the transfer of the audience's negative attitude towards acts of violence to the practice and the predicted consequences of abortion.

[3] The slippery slope fallacy is an abuse of the argument from consequence (cause-effect argumentative scheme) in which "the speculation on unsubstantiated negative consequences is carried to an extreme" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 164).

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In the third instance of pro-life argumentation that I will discuss, the protagonist makes the reality of abortion present to the audience's mind by recreating a war scenario in which a huge number of innocent children are killed and no one is held responsible for their death.

(3) In this unseen and cruel war against life, millions of children have already paid with their life and everyday hundreds or thousands of them are exterminated. What is even more serious is that all of us are aggressors: from the woman who aborts or uses abortive pills, the doctor who breaks his oath, to the last citizen who has a right to vote and who has the power to do something but who prefers ignorance or arrogance towards this pitiless massacre of those who cannot scream (Anon. n.d.). [my translation]

The analogy between abortion and war is meant to make the audience aware of the proportions of the abortion phenomenon in point of the number of victims affected as well as of the agents that are involved in it. There are millions of victims and the category of war criminals includes women that abort or take abortive pills, doctors who perform abortions and finally ordinary citizens who do not take attitude against abortion.

The pro-life arguer founds his analogy on the assumption that what is eliminated by abortion no matter when it occurs is a human being. If it is taken for granted, this assumption makes the analogy between abortion and war seem legitimate before a pro-life audience. Reconstructing the terms of the analogy, the following connections may be found: "War kills human beings. Abortion is similar to war because it kills children who are unborn human beings. The aborted children are like war victims".

The pragma-dialectical questions that can be asked to test the dialectical soundness of the analogy between abortion and war are: "Are abortion and war alike? Are the aborted fetuses similar to the victims of a war? Are the agents involved in an abortion similar to those responsible for a war?" The critical evaluation of this analogy sheds light on some crucial dissimilarities between the events compared which reside in the victims affected by the two events, the agents responsible for the two events and the contexts in which the two events occur. First of all, as previously shown, an embryo / a fetus in the first trimester of pregnancy significantly differs from a born human being in point of personhood and rights. Secondly, aborting mothers, doctors or citizens who do not vote against abortion have nothing in common with war criminals. Thirdly, the context that determines a mother (who is the main agent that is responsible for an abortion) to choose abortion does not resemble the context which determines a war criminal to kill people. The existence of these essential differences between the events compared prove that the pro-life arguer uses the argument from analogy inappropriately, thus committing the fallacy of false analogy by violating the argument scheme rule.

In spite of its dialectical vulnerability, rhetorically, the analogy between abortion and war has a powerful emotional potential transferring the audience's abhorrence of war to the abortion event on the grounds that the aborted fetuses are like the innocent victims killed in a war.

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The last excerpt I will deal with is part of an anti-abortion essay in which abortion is compared to the German holocaust, slavery and September 11, three different events which have been strongly disapproved of.

(4) Somehow, abortionists have become callused to the reality of their actions. […] They are like gas chamber operators during Hitler's holocaust. They are like slave traders who traded in human flesh during slavery. […] If there is any lesson to be learned from September 11, 2001, it is that we should value and protect innocent human life even if it is not our own. This lack of value was the direct cause of the terrorist acts. Think about it. The terrorists and those who directed them had no value for the lives of the flight attendants whose throats were slashed or the innocent secretaries who frantically tried to leave those buildings. This same lack of value for innocent human life is the direct cause of legalized abortion. (Bohannon n.d.)

The pro-life arguer in the present case aims to draw the audience's attention towards the agents responsible for an abortion that are strategically called "abortionists". The negatively connoted term "abortionist", which refers to someone who practices abortion illegally, covers all the categories of agents that participate in an abortion: aborting mothers, doctors and any other agents facilitating the practice of abortion. Interestingly, by foregrounding the resemblance between abortionists and gas chamber operators, slave traders or terrorists, the pro-life protagonist wants to suggest that the people responsible for the events compared are even more condemnable than the facts themselves. All three analogies are explicitly signaled in the text by the presence of the lexical indicators "like" and "same".

Reconstructing the terms of the analogies, the following relationships can be established: "Abortionists are insensitive to their actions the same way slave traders, gas chamber operators or September 11 terrorists were to their deeds. The aborted fetuses are innocent human beings like the victims of Hitler's holocaust, slaves or the victims of terrorists". It appears that all the agents directly responsible for these events have in common the lack of value for human life and all the victims are innocent human beings.

In order to evaluate these analogies in terms of dialectical soundness, the critical questions that may be asked are: "Does abortion really resemble Hitler's holocaust, slavery or September 11 terrorist attack? Are the various participants in an abortion similar to gas chamber operators, slave traders or terrorists? Are the aborted fetuses indeed comparable to the victims of Hitler's holocaust, of slavery or of September 11 terrorist attack? Or are there crucial differences between the events / entities compared?" Like in the case of the previously analyzed analogies, the moral status of the embryo / the fetus is the key element which makes abortion significantly differ from the events to which it is compared. It is doubtful whether a first trimester embryo / fetus shares with the victims of the German holocaust, slavery or terrorist attacks the status of a person. This aspect is essential for determining whether abortion is a criminal act and hence whether the agents involved in the performance of an abortion should be punished accordingly. The pro-life arguer omits relevant dissimilarities between the events compared in point of the status of the victims, the motivation and circumstances

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leading to the respective events and of the agents that may be held responsible. In my view, this is another case of the fallacy of false analogy that the pro-life protagonist commits by inappropriately using the argument from analogy.

Nevertheless, invoking events such as Hitler's holocaust, slavery or September 11 as terms of reference to support the moral impermissibility of abortion is a highly effective rhetorical move intended to make the audience place abortion within the same category of abhorrent criminal acts. Consequently, the negative feelings associated with the image of the gas chambers, slavery or terrorist attacks are transferred to abortion.

4. Conclusions

In this paper I have tried to prove that the use of analogy in pro-life argumentation is part of pro-lifers' emotional appeal which is targeted at the third party audience. The analysis of various pro-life argumentative texts has shown that analogy is strategically employed to make the audience disapprove of abortion on the grounds that it is a situation similar to other events which stir feelings of disapprobation such as war, abuse, the German holocaust, slavery or terrorist attacks.

The application of the pragma-dialectical critical test for the soundness of analogy has revealed that, despite the apparent similarities between abortion and the events to which it is compared, there are essential differences which are not mentioned. Therefore, the use of analogy in the excerpts under analysis proves to be fallacious: rule 7 (the argument scheme rule) for a critical discussion has been violated, the fallacy of false analogy being committed (an argument scheme has been incorrectly applied).

I conclude that these analogies mainly have a rhetorical function and not a dialectical one, to operate what Micheli (2007: 960) calls "a transfer of emotional consensus" (p. 960) from one domain to another: the negative feelings evoked by events such as slavery, the German holocaust or September 11 are transferred to the domain of abortion.

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