

Visual Arguments and Moral Causes in Charity Advertising: Ethical Considerations¹

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Abstract: Social advertising often employs persuasive imagery in support of a morally laden cause. These visual arguments can take the form of veridical representations of the given situation or the form of purposeful *visual blends*. Both visual routes to persuasion have serious ethical issues to confront. In what concerns the purportedly veridical images, controversies about picture retouching and framing have cast many doubts on their success in offering unmediated access to a given reality. Editorial interests have proven far too influential on the destiny of what and how is presented to the audience from the amount of visual material available on a topic. Even when the audience is certain that photos are not doctored, the use of veridical images may be seen as unethical. Their disproportionate affective impact may lead the audience to hold biased opinions, since other concerns may be impossible to capture in a vivid picture. *Visual blends* may be the answer to this problem, employing the fictional or the figurative to help the viewer grasp the moral anatomy of a given situation. Their generous use of figurative meaning may be seen as their strength and their weakness at the same time. It makes them less likely to face accusations of distorting reality, because they do not claim to be windows on reality *per se*. At the same time, it makes them vulnerable to interpretations that miss their true point – one might appreciate the artistry of a visual metaphor or a visual pun and fail to consider the statement it makes about a given situation. Contemporary philosophical approaches to the place of visuals in moral persuasion inform my analysis of the use of visual arguments in charity-oriented advertising.

Keywords: visual rhetoric, veridical images, visual blends, morally laden causes, charity-oriented advertising

Charity-oriented advertising discourse often uses visual arguments to gain audience support for a morally laden cause, such as donating or volunteering in the name of deep compassion for those who suffer. The visual arguments invoked can take the form of veridical representations of the given situation or that of purposeful *visual blends* aimed at provoking psychological effects similar to those of rhetorical figures. Although they render that *slice-of-reality* to the

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audience in different modes, both forms of visual discourse present themselves as truth-providers in what concerns the problem at hand. The former type of pictures claims to help viewers get acquainted with real aspects of the situation, by offering them (purportedly) unmediated access to reality in order to help them perceive the real dimension of the suffering or the real urgency of the helping action. The latter type of pictures, on the other hand, intends to shed a new light on the situation by using *visual blends* – unexpected juxtapositions between the concrete and the abstract, the material and the symbolic, the real and the fictional. While veridical images are essentially factual arguments, most of the *visual blends* underpin arguments based on analogy for the thesis that acting in that situation amounts to X value, while not acting amounts to Y value, with X and Y being at opposite ends of the moral virtue-vice spectrum.

When it comes to their use as warrants in support of morally laden claims, both types of images may be subjected to ethical discussion. In what concerns the former type (the purportedly veridical images), controversies about picture retouching and framing have cast many doubts on their success in offering unmediated access to a given reality. Editorial interests have proven far too influential on the destiny of what and how is presented to the audience from the amount of visual material available on a topic. The latter (*visual blends*), on the other hand, may be linked to deception because of their use of artifice, be it under the form of *mise-en-scène* or post-production procedures. Apart from this, their appeal to the emotional and the symbolic may often be seen with a skeptical eye by advocates of the 'purely rational' routes to persuasion.

Both types of visual arguments can be accused of a disproportionate affective impact that may lead the audience to hold biased opinions. Since the vividness with which an argument is delivered in a discourse is not a reliable indicator of its real strength, one can wonder whether the inclusion of affect laden pictures in a moral discourse is fair play or not.

These and other concerns have stirred serious contemporary debates on whether it is legitimate to use visuals in argumentation. These debates became the starting point for my own investigation on the ethical implications of image use in support of morally laden causes. To achieve this purpose, I bring together philosophical considerations on the use of veridical images in moral persuasion and Cognitive Linguistics accounts regarding the construction of *blended spaces* to help understand the rhetorical action of both veridical and artful images. I look at morally laden appeals in charity advertising as a suitable provider of cases that may help illustrate the main points of my theoretical contribution.

I. Ethical Issues Posed by 'Degree Zero Images'

The term 'degree zero images' refers to those pictures that purport to represent a given portion of reality in an accurate manner – no figurativeness involved. The term can be used to distinguish images that are published with the pretense of being accurate representations of a given reality from the artfully deviating

images. The term 'artful deviations' applied to the visual domain refers to those images which cause an incongruity with the mental schema of the viewer because they employ fictional elements or figurative meaning (for more on the use of these terms, see Grancea 2011, 89). In this section of the article, I discuss various ethical problems that 'degree-zero' images may pose, while the second section will be devoted to the working of artfully deviating pictures.

Most of us are well aware of the fact that contemporary technological progress brought major changes on the way pictures are processed, published and perceived by the audience (Kobre 1995, 14-15; Roberts and Webber 1999, 3-5). The ability to modify the content of a picture with the use of computer programs raises difficult questions both for creators and receivers of visual forms of public discourse. The audience are increasingly alert about the accuracy of the factual information presented in the media pictures. The need for journalists to be explicit about the authentic or fake nature of the picture is now a well-defined expectation on the part of the audience, given that most of them are familiar with the wide availability of technical means to modify pictures and distort reality (Roberts and Webber 1999, 5). Journalists have been the focus of much heated debate regarding the proper use of pictures as providers of access to 'truth' (Wheeler and Gleason 1995, 8-12). Borderline cases made these moral issues even harder to sort out: a case of domestic violence pictures which were computer-generated based on the descriptions of a witness raised many eyebrows when the information that they were not 'real' came out. Yet, the real pictures of the victim turned out to be even more disturbing when they were presented in Court, but they were never made available to the public (Kobre 1995, 14-15). In such cases, where access to the real pictures is made impossible, should we deem the use of computer-generated pictures legitimate? Such questions only scratch the surface of the complex issues entailed in the ethical debates on the use of media picture as faithful representations of reality.

But it is not only the truth-value of pictures that is under fire from an ethical point of view. Negatively-valenced images that portray victims of various social ills may raise other ethical problems. Frequent accusations include lack of respect for the dignity of the people portrayed, humiliation of those in similar situations, heightened anxiety among vulnerable audiences and increased complacency among those not affected by the respective problem (the risks posed by insisting on fear appeals in public service campaigns are extensively discussed by Hastings, Stead and Webb 2004). Apart from this, manipulation of meaning through frame-sentences is also a bargaining question raising many doubts about the honest treatment of pictorial proof by editors of newspapers and magazines or by the authors of social campaigns (for a sample of the ethical issues entailed in image framing, see Martinez Lirola 2014; Popp and Mendelson 2010; and Winn 2009).

Finally, other ethical questions concern pictures' ability to form sound arguments in moral deliberation. Pictures that present details of an abortion

procedure and its results, footage from the execution of people sentenced to death, close-up images that show the physical degradation of a starving child are sometimes invoked as arguments in the moral debates developed around these issues. Yet, many people question their argumentative soundness and claim that they are mere affective stimuli or that they offer biased representations to the viewer because their counterparts are not always as easy to represent visually. Some of the most important philosophical considerations underlying the use of 'clean' (unmodified) pictures as moral arguments are discussed by Sarah McGrath in her 2011 article, "Normative Ethics, Conversion and Pictures as Tools of Moral Persuasion", published in the *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics* (2011). In what follows, I will discuss some of the most valuable ideas she brings forth.

I.1 Pictures as Core Providers of *Acquaintance* with a Given Topic

McGrath's engagement with the topic is strictly limited to pictures that are not 'doctored' in any way (McGrath 2011, 277). She develops a strong case against those who reject the ability of pictures to work as sound arguments and pleads for visual arguments to be seen as a legitimate form of moral persuasion because of their ability to provide acquaintance with the situation that is under moral scrutiny. From her point of view, images can function as satisfactory substitutes for direct experience in helping the onlooker become acquainted with the topic at hand. Getting familiar with the factual aspects of a given practice may help one in reaching a deeper understanding of the moral implications that practice entails. She admits that veridical images have various shortcomings when compared to direct experience, but insists that their role of providing audience acquaintance with relevant factual information is most valuable (274-277). In other words, an image may be understood as a factual argument aimed at causing a rational change of mind in moral matters.

This change of mind can happen in two ways. First, pictures may offer factual information that the audience did not have about the practice whose morality is questioned. A recurrent example in her article is an anti-abortion activist's usage of pictures in order to convince a hostile audience that certain features of the abortion procedure render it unacceptable from a moral standpoint. If any of the members of the audience change their minds following exposure to these pictures, McGrath strongly believes that such change should not be seen as an irrational or a non-rational change of mind. Therefore, one should not place the blame for this change of mind on the ill-defined "emotional effects" of the picture, but look at the fully legitimate rational process at play in this case. She writes about such cases of picture-induced conversion that

A case in which one gives up a moral view upon discovering that until now one's commitment to that view has been based on a mistaken factual belief is a paradigm of rational change in view; it is reasonable if any change in moral attitude ever is. (McGrath 2011, 274)

Secondly, pictures may provide more vivid expressions of the same pieces of information that have been delivered to the audience in the verbal component of the discourse. Sometimes, pictures do not bring any novelty in terms of factual knowledge, but only express the same considerations in a more vivid way, which may contribute to a conversion experience on the part of the audience. Even in this case, McGrath insists that we should not see such picture-induced changes of mind any less legitimate from a rational point of view:

Acquaintance Helps: Even among those who are aware of the relevant non-moral facts, someone who is acquainted with that practice via pictures is (all else being equal) in a better position to judge its moral permissibility than someone who is not. (McGrath 2011, 276-277).

If we allow verbal discourse to make use of various rhetorical strategies in order to make the situation more vivid in our minds, perhaps we should not prevent visual discourse from pressing the same buttons. After all, the rhetorical action at play is the same in both cases. Both forms of rhetoric pull their best strings to help the audience get beyond a glimpse of that situation and grasp its true meaning, capture the flavor of that sort of experience, see better what it is about. Rational changes of mind can also occur after exposure to vivid representations of certain ideas that had been presented to us before in a poor form which impeded our full understanding of the matter.

I. 2 The Use of 'Degree-Zero' Pictures in Support of General Claims

A common objection to the use of pictures goes as follows: since pictures can only portray a particular event or person, it is not reasonable – by current inductive standards – to derive general conclusions about the type of situation that is portrayed. Sarah McGrath's answer points to the fact that the features that cause the picture-induced change of mind may very well be general features of the situation-type that the picture is a token of. To support her point, she gives the rather unexpected example of a movie being projected in different theatres: even if one is dealing with different tokens of the same type, one can derive legitimate conclusions about the way the movie ends. Ethical problems concerning generalization on the basis of pictures arise only when this condition does not apply.

From my point of view, one can easily abstract from this argument a normative principle regarding the use of pictures as moral arguments: to be ethically acceptable, a picture used as a moral argument should not place a special emphasis on features that are not found in other tokens of the same situation-type. If all starving children share feature F, feature F can be the focus of a picture used as an argument in debates about solutions to famine because one can legitimately derive conclusions about other tokens of the starvation-type, even if it is a picture of a single case. The use of the picture would be unethical only if feature F would be the consequence of another illness that the

child has and that has nothing to do with famine and therefore is not applicable to all the children in the same situation.

However, McGrath's proposed solution to the issue of generalization based on single-case pictures may not be as easy to apply as it seems at first sight. Since resemblance between real instances is never comparable to that between different projections of the same movie, decisions regarding which pictures can form a basis for generalization and which cannot will often come down to distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant aspects of a picture: relevant resemblance with other tokens should be enough for the picture to be seen as a legitimate basis for generalization, even if there may be other irrelevant differences that separate it from other tokens of the same situation-type. However, I am afraid that this sole decision can become a source of disagreement: members of opposing camps in a moral debate may have very different perceptions of what counts as relevant resemblance and what does not. For example, Kelland and Macleod (2015, 186) believe that the usage of images with 3-month children who are aborted is unethical on these accounts, while I myself believe these pictures provide a reasonable basis for generalization regarding what the living entity in the womb is. The two authors claim that this sort of images are not accurate illustrations of what an aborted fetus looks like since most abortions are performed on earlier stages of a pregnancy, when the living entity is not necessarily recognizable as such:

Put differently, given that the vast majority of abortions are performed in the first trimester of pregnancy and that later procedures are performed towards the end of the second and in the third trimester, images of foetuses aborted at this late stage do not represent the typical case of abortion and are therefore inadequate in terms of providing a basis for generalization. In the particular case of anti-abortion campaigns' use of foetal imagery from late procedures, then, the objection stands and McGrath's response cannot be used. (Kelland and Macleod 2015, 185)

The above interpretation is rather unconvincing to me (and, I assume, to many pro-life activists who support this kind of images). The point of the picture is to get readers to recognize that a small-scale human being is growing inside a mother's womb and abortion brutally stops this process. A life which is there, not an abstraction, not a would-be life, but a life that is ongoing since conception. Indeed, pictures of late-abortion fetuses make this point better because one can recognize the small-scale human being that is slaughtered. The expressive power of such images does not rest particularly on the size or shape of the body, but on what that living entity is. From this point of view, the pictures of late abortions can be treated like relevant tokens of the abortion-type of situation and can be seen as sharing all the features that matter with pictures of early ones: ever since the moment of conception, the living entity has the chromosomal structure of a full-fledged human being, something that is only made visible by its shape at a later stage. It is this late stage that makes the pictures more spectacular, because

one can actually see the organs already developed. However, it is not at this late stage that it begins to have this structure, it has it all the time, ever since the moment of conception.

To make an analogy, let us assume that a cause-related campaign shows victims with physical injuries which resulted from domestic violence and that they happen to be blonde. Now let us further assume that someone objected that the proposed token is not relevant for the situation-type because not all women are blonde. Would this objection be enough to render the photos unable to provide a basis for generalization? I deeply doubt it. The aforementioned reply would most likely be seen as a misunderstanding on the receiver's part, because the relevant aspect of the picture was not the hair colour. In a similar way, the stage of development of the unborn baby would be irrelevant to someone who believes the point of the pictures is to show that a small-scale human being is slaughtered. Yet, this same feature of the baby would be very much relevant to people on the other side – the so-called 'pro-choice' activists who build their case around the idea that life becomes life-to-be-considered-as-such only at some point in its development.

We can easily see that decisions about the resemblance between different tokens of the same situation-type will often depend on the views held by each participant in the moral debate. One has good reasons to believe that when she purports the analogy to motion pictures aired in different locations, McGrath is perfectly aware of the fact that different pictured tokens of a situation-type are almost never identical to one another in all respects, the way movies are. Reality does not have the habit of reproducing itself exactly the same every time it occurs (the way movies are). I take her analogy to refer only to identity in those respects that matter for the case under discussion. But it is precisely here that the main theoretical difficulty of her solution arises: in the realm of moral deliberation, how will opposing sides come to an agreement on the features that matter, given that decisions concerning relevance will often depend on the presuppositions each adheres to? When wondering whether generalizations on the basis of particular pictures are legitimate or not, questions of relevance will most likely provide material for further controversy.

I. 3 Biasing Effect of 'Degree-Zero' Pictures

Because of their intrinsic technological limitations, pictures can make only a few aspects of a situation particularly salient. This is why pictorial arguments may be accused of drawing the audience into giving more weight to one part of the story. Other aspects of the given situation that are perhaps equally important (or even more important) are entirely left out or given insufficient weight because of the vivid pictorial arguments that set the stage for the discourse in an unfair manner. Perhaps the other aspects do not in principle admit being visualized, because they pertain to the unseen, such as the inner life of the people involved (for example, contrast considerations that regard one's relationship to God with

images of satisfying one's bodily pleasures), perhaps they happened in a context that made it impossible for photographs to be taken (Kelland and Macleod contrast the situations that may have led to a woman having an unwanted or unsupported pregnancy with images of aborted fetuses, showing that it is not easy to capture vividly the most important factual details of the former – see Kelland and Macleod 2015, 191), perhaps they involve a political effort that entails a complex course of action which cannot be captured in a single photograph (McGrath contrasts pictures which portray victims of a civil war that occurred in a far-off land with the costs of a military intervention in that area – while pictures of victims may motivate support for the intervention, true knowledge about the human and material costs involved in the intervention may change the views of the audience – see McGrath 2011, 286). In all these cases, arguments on the other side may be swamped altogether because pictures formulate the rules of the game in a manner lacking fair-play.

Sarah McGrath believes that the danger of bias can be seen as a reason to use *more* pictures in moral deliberation, not to eschew pictures altogether (McGrath 2011, 284). She takes the example of capital punishment: indeed, many people would vote for it to be abolished after seeing photos of real-life executions, often leaving out of site that fact that they have no access to equally vivid pictures of the crimes committed by those who are sentenced to death. But this does not mean that we should decry the biasing effect of pictures that portray executed people, but add to the debate pictures of their victims and then let the audience ponder on issues of justice. Innovative as it may be, this solution would still be far from solving the problem of those aspects which do not admit visualization.

That being said, I believe that McGrath manages to be quite persuasive in her insistence that avoiding all available photographs is not necessarily the best way to go about moral deliberations. One must admit that there are cases in which photographs may have an important contribution in helping the audience become aware of factual details that are difficult to put in words. McGrath has an interesting analogy which captures pretty well the ridiculous position of those who reject the use of pictures in moral deliberation because of their power to express only certain morally relevant features in a particularly vivid way, while leaving others aside:

Compare the way in which a judge might declare a genuine piece of evidence inadmissible, for no other reason than in his judgment it is so sensational compared to other pieces of relevant evidence, that they will be neglected or given insufficient weight by members of the jury. (Inclusion of that piece of evidence is likely to distort the Jurors' deliberations to the point that they are better off basing their deliberations on a body of evidence that is objectively impoverished). (McGrath 2011, 285)

I would like to add that bias alone cannot be reason enough to render pictures unable to form sound arguments. Framing effects have long been

studied in verbal discourse and yet nobody thought of eschewing words altogether in argumentation, just because they can be used to frame certain portions of reality in an unfair manner. Other solutions were proposed instead: increased accountability for authors' choice of words, increased audience skepticism, theoretical and practical studies on the partial and fallible nature of most sentences that purport to describe complex realities and on the possibility to develop alternative formulations of one and the same problem. Whether we could apply similar solutions to similar problems posed by pictorial arguments is an open question for future research.

As a final thought on this discussion on bias, I believe it is worth calling-into-question the promise of acquaintance which McGrath takes to be the main benefit provided by a photograph. I tend to believe that each photograph contains an implicit acquaintance-presupposition, consisting in the unspoken promise that it helps the audience see what the event is really about. It is how most of us implicitly understand the role of a veridical photograph, be it a picture that accompanies a piece of news or one that accompanies the call-to-action of a charity-oriented campaign. In the terms of speech-act theory, it purports to be a constative speech-act - one that purports to describe accurately how some things are in the world. Implicit commitment to truth is only part of its discursive action; implicit commitment to providing acquaintance of the audience with relevant aspects of the issue is the second part - the audience actually expects those pictures to be representative of the practice that is portrayed. On the basis of this implicit acquaintance-promise, the naive members of the audience are more vulnerable to accepting distorted representations of reality. Overcoming this danger involves increased skepticism about the degree to which the given picture actually fulfills its implicit promise of getting the audience acquainted with relevant aspects of the practice. One should be educated about pictures' ability to distract our attention from what is truly important, to circumvent the burden of proof, to emphasize irrelevant details - all these limits must be kept in mind by the audience when analyzing pictures as moral arguments. But to do this, we would need an adequate theory of pictorial argument that would be made available to larger audiences. High school curricula would be a good start, from my point of view.

I. 4. The Use of 'Degree-Zero' Pictures in Charity Ads

As I announced at the beginning, one aim of the present investigation is to use contemporary contributions in moral philosophy to form a deeper understanding of the ethics of visual discourse in advertising campaigns which have morally laden causes at their core. Let us consider how the philosophical aspects discussed until now can illuminate the ethical dimension of charitable campaigns devoted to the case of homeless people.

Pictures of real-life street dwellers may help an audience grasp the particular hardships involved in living on the street. In the absence of the

pictures, one might fail to consider, for example, what a 'silent' night might mean for a homeless person, what 'freedom' and 'friends' mean for that person, what a festive dinner looks like. In McGrath's words, pictures are a way getting *acquainted* with homelessness. Seeing particular physical transformations that a homeless person goes through would help the audience think more thoroughly about the implications of being homeless. This echoes Renita Coleman's conclusions that images may induce people to think through the situation of those affected (Coleman 2006, 836). Although sometimes they are negatively-valenced, provoking fear or disgust, these pictures can cause more than the immediate visceral reactions. They can pose a problem, a serious one to the audience. It is interesting to note here that when an overly explicit film that presented an abortion was denied airing on television, the creators used it as an argument that strengthened their position, saying that

'If something is so horrifying that we are not allowed to see it, perhaps we should not be tolerating it' (Cull 1997, 518).

With more and more people participating in the world-wide-web talk, chances for censoring the distribution of an image are rather small. The simple fact that the image is too grisly for mainstream media does not mean that it will not reach the envisaged audience via alternative online channels. Controversies like the one mentioned above might actually arouse interest in the matter.

If particular physical details (grisly as they may be) can in fact be attributed to all situations of homelessness, there is nothing preventing one from drawing a general moral conclusion based on an isolated photo of a homeless person. It is true that every picture tends to slice up reality, pick a tiny bit and showcase it while minimizing other aspects that might be equally relevant from a moral point of view. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that it distorts reality – although there is a long tradition of treating this as the 'distorsion inherent in all photographic images' (Petchesky 1987, 268). Yes, any picture of a homeless person will pick one aspect of reality and showcase it as the reality of the homeless. But, as long as reality itself can confirm the typicality of the case portrayed, there is nothing in the way of distorsion here.

Moreover, both McGrath and Coleman suggest that there is an invaluable aid that people might get from pictures in their mental elaboration on the given situation. Coleman writes that apart from the emotional appeal of photographs, there is also explicit processing involved in understanding the implications of the situation that is portrayed – her empirical evidence supports the idea that sophisticated mental elaboration does occur in response to pictures (Coleman 2006, 845-46).

If we accept this implicit suggestion that we can treat unmodified pictures as legitimate factual arguments, we can see that real-life provocative pictures with homeless people can be the lighting match that stirs a debate, or at least awakens interest in the subject. A lot of the charity advertising that is going on in the world today is focused on raising awareness of an issue. It is one argument

among many, it ensures a voice in the crowded space of competing voices, a voice that sometimes presents itself as the 'voice of reality' (because of the 'seeing is believing' unconscious conviction of many people in the Western world). Yet, nothing is wrong with it, if the image is representative of the situation that it purports to describe – that is, I follow McGrath in her insistence on resemblance between the situation captured in the picture and the situation-type that it purports to be a token of. The picture can work as a full-fledged factual argument if it is representative of the case it portrays and surrounded by words that do justice to the cause.

Here, we must emphasize that the force of most visual arguments often depends on the surrounding verbal content that frames it. It is only with the aid of words that a picture showing someone's terrible suffering can be turned into a clear argument in a deliberative mode, i.e. "this is what we, onlookers, can do to alleviate such suffering." Isolated from words, an image may evoke powerful emotions and even provide acquaintance with a practice, but it will remain in the horizon of epideictic discourse, not involving immediate action. However, the same requirements apply to any factual argument presented by means of verbal discourse. Wittgenstein talked about a 'proposition-radical' (1953, 11) to refer to the part of a sentence that needs the surrounding verbal content to become full-blown speech act with a clear meaning for the listener. Similarly, we might talk about all sorts of facts (be they rendered in words or images) that are only 'argument-radicals.' Facts *per se* are not yet factual arguments. The form in which they are delivered, the frame that is chosen for them, the surrounding text give them meaning and turn them into full-blown factual arguments.

Building on this idea, another problem arises: the ease with which manipulative turns of discourse can ensue in the two cases – verbal and visual discourse. Pictures may be used as a powerful tool to raise awareness of a problem and thus turn audience attention away from the lack of specific information regarding the solution proposed by the charitable organization to that problem. Agreement on the fact that there is a serious problem to be tackled does not bring about agreement that the best solution is the one proposed by the people behind the advertising campaign. From a sudden understanding of homelessness as a social ill that deserves higher interest, it does not follow that the advertiser (the respective charitable organization) deserves the required financial support. Various organizations may propose alternative solutions to the same problem, but only one of them may have an ongoing advertising campaign at the moment. Therefore, campaign creators should offer valid arguments regarding why their solution is superior and not regarding the mere existence of the problem.

The ethics of social campaign creation implies an emphasis on the solutions that the advertised project brings to the problem. The audience needs answers to key-questions on trustworthiness, commitment, viability and visibility of the charitable organization and of the alleviation project: is the

organization committed to tackling this problem on a long-term or is this a short project won by 'communication goals' to be achieved and no concrete measures regarding its real-life impact? Are there any guarantees that the money donated is well used - can one track the money and receive notifications when cases are solved? Is this a problem that might be solved rather by state intervention or by private charities? Instead of focusing on development of answers to this question and manners of comprising them in an ad, cause-related campaigns often focus on the problem *per se*. One must admit that emotionally laden pictures (portraying particular instances of the problem) often contribute to this hijack of the argumentative discourse, a hijack that is characteristic to many cause-related campaigns.

That being said, I must admit that the same hijacking of the discourse can (and often does) very well happen when words are the means of expression. Think of the 1979 shrewd slogan "Labour isn't working," the pun referring simultaneously to Britain's workforce and the name of the Labour Party. Saatchi and Saatchi, the agency which created the campaign for the Conservative Party, based its discourse on the fact that the high unemployment rate was a major source of frustration for many British citizens of the time. Yet, the subsequent sentence in the print ad does not necessarily follow from this first sentence already accepted as being true. It said "Britain's better off with the Conservatives." It was not a sentence about the Conservative Party's ability to tackle the problem - in fact, the unemployment rate has reportedly remained at the same levels long after the Conservatives won the elections. What it did was to essentially hijack the argumentative discourse: they hoped people's eyes would be caught by the pun, while a reality-check would confirm the first descriptive utterance - the Labour Party politics to solve unemployment were indeed not working.

With such examples in mind, we can conclude that the blame for hijacking a discourse should not be placed on the type of language used - in our case, verbal or visual. Both words and pictures, when invoked as arguments, can turn out to embody cases of *ignoratio elenchi*, the fallacy of arguing for a different thesis than that which is under discussion.

II. Explaining the Rhetorical Action of *Blended Visuals* in Charity Ads

The following section of the article is my original answer to an invitation launched by Kelland and Macleod in their 2015 article (invoked several times in my discussion on images' ability to form sound visual arguments). The two authors believe that artfully deviating images might provide a promising path for future research on pictorial arguments:

Both we and McGrath are primarily interested in photographs that claim to represent the direct truth. In a broader discussion it would be interesting to distinguish between these types of images and those, such as art-images, that

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represent an interpretation of the 'truth.' That is, not all images claim to be unmediated or transparent (Kelland and Macleod 2015, 193).

I believe this second type of images are particularly interesting to analyze as moral arguments. When they are part of a charitable campaign, these images aspire equally to truth, but in a different manner – they attempt to interpret one aspect of the truth, to make it more salient to the audience by means of rhetorical devices. If they employ the fictional or the figurative, they do it for offering viewers a more *accurate* description of the *true* moral implications that a situation entails, some of which may be difficult to capture in a 'degree-zero' photo.

Their generous use of figurative meaning may be seen as their strength and their weakness at the same time. It makes them less likely to face accusations of distorting reality, because they do not claim to be windows on reality *per se*. At the same time, it makes them vulnerable to interpretations that miss their true point such as purely aesthetic considerations – one might appreciate the artistry of a visual metaphor or a visual pun and fail to consider the statement it makes about a given situation.

Let us take a look at the photograph in Figure 1. It is part of an ad campaign created in 2007 by the advertising agency Saatchi and Saatchi for a Dutch charitable organization, Cordaid. Let us see if this image can constitute a sound moral argument or not.



Figure 1. Charity Ad created by Saatchi and Saatchi in 2007 for Cordaid, an international charitable organization. Headline says: "Sunglasses 24 euro. Access to water 8 euro." Body copy says: "Text 'aid' to 2255 and donate 1.50 euro. People in Need. Cordaid."

A first glimpse at the photo reveals a typical fashion ad: slim model, elegant posture, exotic setting, expensive fashion items, and focus on a branded product (the sunglasses). Yet, something in the eyes of the model says more. Nothing of the usual exuberance, the standard shallowness, the well-known sensuality of fashion models. Something serious, penetrating in her glance makes us freeze for a moment. The headline makes light: after the fashion-magazine cliché of displaying the price right next to the advertised product ("sunglasses,

24 euro”), the text says, in smaller font: “access to water, 8 euro.” Her glance now has an explanation: she was not advertising the sunglasses after all. The depth in her attitude reflected the seriousness of her condition. The text invites the viewers to donate 1.50 by writing 'aid' to the announced phone number.

What strikes one is the unobtrusive *ethos* of the message. The smaller font in which 'access to water' is written shows reticence in disturbing our joyful plans for shopping. The same idea is supported by the lack of any explicit image that would illustrate their suffering from lack of access to water. She seems to be saying in a barely-heard voice “I know you'd rather see sunglasses instead of sick and poor people, so this is what I show you. But perhaps you might consider helping us, too.” The small sum of money that is suggested is coherent with this unobtrusive approach.

The headline and sub-headline might also be read as an allusion to our shopping list – if you make room for the 24 euro – glasses, perhaps you find room for 'aid' in your budget plans. Yet, the sense of shame and guilt is there, perhaps more so than if we had been delivered an overt comparison between their needs and our spending choices.

The entire print ad is the visual expression of a *blend* – the result of the mental operation of conceptual integration (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 40-44). Their world and our world are not compared, nor contrasted, but *blended*. We do not see a picture of a model with 24 euro – glasses on and next to it, another picture of a person struck by poverty. I believe that this *visual blend* sends a much more important message: if we think these expensive fashionable items would not make sense in her world, are we sure they do make sense in ours? From my point of view, the ridiculous reasons people invoke to invest massively in expensive fashion items are the true target of this *visual blend*.

The other dimension of the *blended space*, the verbal one, probably alludes to a shopping list of a well-off person, who affords to spend on trivial products to satisfy personal whims (not real needs). If we plan to spend that much on items that fulfill rather imaginary needs, would we consider one investment that would actual fulfill someone else's real need? This interpretation is coherent with other print ads of the campaign: another ad featured a slender woman showing an expensive purse (whose price was contrasted with that of food for a week), while two ads featuring men contrasted the price for an after-shave with the basics for a new home and the price of a pint of beer with that of 50 liters of fresh water. The fact that a small gesture can make a huge difference for them provides a significant encouragement to give up our current complacency and start doing something for them.

The possibility to defy the spatial distance (conveyed powerfully by means of the visual and verbal *blends* and explained practically by the 'sms' solution) works as an awakening towards the possibility of doing something for real, but also as a reminder that even if this type of suffering is not happening here, it is

happening right now – right as we engage in trivial product shopping that we could moderate in order to help others.

I believe that this visual expression of a *blended space* stands for a powerful moral argument, not only to donate money to Cordaid, but also to reconsider our spending priorities. I would like to use here Steven Pinker's catch phrase on understanding fiction as 'empathy-technology' – that is, by engaging in the imaginary worlds that fictional literature builds in our minds, we learn to put ourselves in other people's place and see the world through their eyes. When one looks closely at the discursive action of the *visual blend* of the Cordaid campaign, one can detect a similar effect: the visual itself leads us to reflect on what the same money might mean for that woman, on what real needs are for other people, on what their experience feels like. It invites us to reflect critically on the morality of the choices we make when we go out spending, but it does so in the particular form of *blending* our reality and theirs. No trace of explicit moralizing discourse is felt here, yet the message is delivered with full force – which I take to be quite well-adapted to current sensitivities of Western audiences.

If one analyzes the deliberative dimension of this discourse, it is easy to notice the same faults I mentioned earlier in the case of the homeless campaign: from the fact that these people have these real needs and the fact that we spend obscenely more on trivial products, it does not follow that Cordaid has the best solution.

However, if one analyzes the epideictic dimension of this discourse, I believe this *visual blend* does more in the way of awakening our disgust towards trivial spending and passivity. It has a special power to awake 'self-identification' with one who suffers. By doing so, it can shape our understanding of the empathetic dimension of compassion.

Would it be too much to say that this visual blend is a full-fledged *appeal to virtue*? I pose this question in an open way, inviting to deeper reflection on the role that such images may play in the social construction of 'virtuous actions' in our contemporary times. A silent (yet effective) construction of what it means to manifest virtue X by doing such-and-such in a concrete situation and of what it means to manifest vice Y by not acting in that situation. For youngsters that have little patience in exploring complex sequences of arguments in moral philosophy, could one powerful well-crafted image do the job of making virtuous behaviour appealing? An exploratory question for empirical research would regard the ability of images to work as a lighting match for the pursuit of virtue. For it to count as argument, we should be able to prove that this lighting match is essentially causing a *rational* assessment of the situation, not a purely visceral reaction to it.

For the time being, I invite you to explore the depths of this *visual blend* in the light of a piece of Christian literature that ties the virtue of mercy to self-identification with the one who suffers. Paul Blowers' attempt to abstract a

theory of virtue ethics from the work of Saint Maximus the Confessor includes some ideas that I believe are most valuable in this case. Blowers says that Saint Maximus the Confessor tied the virtue of mercy to *voluntary self-identification* with another who suffers and treated it as a consummately deifying virtue (Blowers 2013, 347). It is worth noting here that from a Christian perspective, one's reaction to another's suffering is to allow that pain to be part of oneself and consider ways in which to alleviate that suffering. But what is the motivation that a person might have to pursue such a virtue, since it seems to multiply hurt, not alleviate it? For our age of fun and self-indulgence, helping the people in need seems to have chances of success only when presented as a 'self-development' initiative, not as lending our heart to take somebody else's pain in. The practical answer to the question above is that true empathy will find ways for concrete measures to help those in pain, while cold hearts will only see pretexts for doing nothing or placing the blame on others. In the light of the Christian approach, things may be seen quite differently: in breathing in another person's pain, we become part of a chain of love at the end of which is always God, the substance of which is only God. Another person's hurt is an unspoken invitation for me to take part in this mystery of love, while the burden I take on my own shoulders will be shared with Christ, who is always there, where suffering is. Christ, Love itself, makes Himself present in our lives each time we show signs of wanting to grow in love, to enrich ourselves in God by taking on ourselves the pain of the other.

Equal love is [...] the key agent for healing the displaced desires and fragmented inclinations that alienate creatures from one another. Love's scope is not only moral, but also ontological, since it works under Divine providence to assuage the bodily as well as existential inequalities among human beings and to recover their natural equality and kinship [...]. In all of this, the true center of gravity is the mystery of love [...]. In this mystery, Divine kenosis and human ascent in deification intersect and mirror each other. Furthermore, and here is truly a centerpiece of Maximus' virtue ethics, Christ the Logos condescends to dwell in the virtues of the virtuous, availing himself personally and intimately to those drawn to Him (Blowers 2013, 349-350).

III. Images as Moral Arguments – A Few Open-Ended Thoughts

I hope that throughout this paper I managed to illustrate some of most important strengths and weaknesses of the moral arguments based on images. The section devoted to the so-called 'degree-zero' images (the veridical images that present themselves as truthful representations of the situation that is under scrutiny) was meant to bring together a set of different strands of research that shed different lights on their argumentative power.

The most optimistic view is that of Princeton philosopher Sarah McGrath who believes that images should be seen as legitimate forms of argumentation in moral debates. She develops a strong case for inclusion of pictures in moral deliberation. I felt the need to insist on some of the points she is making and, on several occasions, to show that there may be serious limits to the application of

her suggestions in what regards the properly ethical use of pictures (both on the side of the creators and that of the audience). Essentially, she manages to show that there are many cases when pictures are the sole providers of a valuable proof, sometimes consisting in non-moral features of a practice, without which participants in the debate might draw incomplete or inadequate conclusions about what that practice entails. After analyzing her complex rebuttal of the opposite side (people who are against the use of pictures as arguments), one may find special value in some of her remarks. For example, she refutes the *bad-inductive-practice* accusation by showing that even if pictures portray particular situations, they can still be used to form more general conclusions, if the features that a picture emphasizes are in fact general features shared by members of the same class. Looking at a contemporary debate regarding the legitimacy of real-life pictures in anti-abortion campaigns, I show that there may be serious limits to her solution, because opposing sides in a debate will not agree easily on what counts as *relevant* features that should be found in all exemplars of that situation-type. My point is that what will count as *relevant feature* will often depend on the *presuppositions* that each side holds.

Following McGrath, issues of bias, distortion, and subjectivity are also discussed in various forms throughout the present paper and usually resolved by analogies with the verbal discourse that show the existence of similar limitations in both types of rhetoric.

All in all, I tend to say that 'degree-zero images' have a paradoxical status, which may bring about increased skepticism towards their use in moral persuasion. On the one hand, they contain an *acquaintance presupposition* – an implicit promise that they can get us *acquainted* with the aspects of the situation that are important to see. On the other, their inherent technological limitations mean they can only pick a small portion of what is worth seeing and showcase it as *the reality about the subject matter*. It is up to the photographer to leave out other aspects that may have equal importance. Moreover, contemporary developments in technology allow for sophisticated image transformations that are hard to detect and that raise serious doubts about the authenticity of the image – post-production actions may remove a lot, from details of the setting to important characters without which the story does not have the same significance. Furthermore – and this is a well-worn topic in communication studies – the words that accompany the picture may offer one particular interpretation, while alternative interpretations may be equally valid. Finally, there may always be morally relevant aspects that are impossible to render in a visual form: matters of the inner life, abstract notions, complex sequences of political moves are just a few examples of issues that cannot become subjects of a 'degree-zero' picture. This is what motivated Giovanni Sartori's radical skepticism in what regards the ability of televisual news to make viewers think seriously about large-scale matters that affect their lives (Sartori 2006, 33).

When it comes to possible solutions for the topics that are difficult to visualize, I believe it is worth considering an alternative mode of visual expression: those images that employ the fictional or the figurative in order to make a point. The visual rhetorical figures may draw audience attention and may offer an incentive for sharing the campaign with others via *social media* and therefore ensure rapid dissemination and high visibility for the cause. One interesting detail is that the Cordaid campaign I invoked in section II is enjoying a lot of attention even now, in 2015 (although it was realized in 2007). On the organization's official website, impressive data are mentioned: over 9 million people saw it on Facebook during February-March 2015 and 3.5 million are following it on Twitter.² However, this massive attention is not necessarily a sign regarding its argumentative action on behalf of the moral cause it supports. If one follows closely the names of the site that took it up spontaneously in 2015, most of them are creativity sites that appreciated the quality of visual rhetorical blend and not necessarily charity sites that would provide solutions for those people.

To support this point, I believe another campaign based on *visual blending* is worth mentioning here: the image of a young woman trying to make her way through her flooded village is accompanied by many hands showing the 'thumbs-up' sign – an allusion to the 'like' button on Facebook. The text says: "Liking isn't helping. Be a volunteer. Change a life" – the charity behind the campaign is Crisis Relief Singapore.³ This example may be useful from two points of view – first, its content illustrates the point I was making, that mere virality does not mean responsible engagement with the social problem at hand. Secondly, its mode of realization illustrates the power that *visual blends* may have when they are well-realized and adequately understood. I doubt that one could think of an equally powerful text to provoke disgust towards the passive attitude of bystanders who only click the button 'like' when they encounter a social case. What is at stake here is precisely the empathy-technology I was invoking in section II. The unspoken invitation is the same 'self-identification' with the victim: how ridiculous would the 'like' gesture seem, if you were her?

Such examples give us strong reasons to explore in more depth the power of *visual blends* in developing arguments based on analogy. In a world where large audiences have very little patience to follow moral pleas until the end, surprising pictures that deliver the message in a blink may be a valuable complementary route to moral persuasion.

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