

# What we hide in words: Value-based reasoning and emotive language

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**ABSTRACT:** There are emotively powerful words that can modify our judgment, arouse our emotions and influence our decisions. This paper shows how the use of emotive meaning in argumentation can be explained by showing how their logical dimension, which can be analysed using argumentation schemes, combines with heuristic processes triggered by emotions. Arguing with emotive words is shown to use value-based practical reasoning grounded on hierarchies of values and maxims of experience for evaluative classification.

**KEYWORDS:** argumentation schemes, character attacks, central-peripheral process, emotions, heuristics, emotive words, persuasion, rhetorical strategies

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The 2013 Italian presidential election can be considered as a rhetorical battlefield. The different parties (especially the right- and left-wing coalitions) focused more on attacking the alternatives than promoting constructive programs. In this context, a crucial role was played by rhetoric and in particular by emotive words. The voters were not provided with slogans describing long-term plans, but mainly with terms crystallizing negative properties of the competing parties. Instead of reporting and describing complex reasoning or lengthy discourses, the newspapers quoted such emotive characterizations and contributed to creating a war of epithets. This political example highlights a fundamental argumentative strategy, the use of emotive or ethical terms. If we leave for a moment the political and statistical considerations and analyze this tactic from a philosophical, argumentative and linguistic perspective, we are left with unanswered questions. The first one can be formulated as follows: What makes a word emotive?

There are words – or rather concepts – that do not simply describe a fragment of possible reality. “Terrorist” is not simply used to refer to a person who commits specific actions with a specific intent. Words such as “torture” or “massacre”, “freedom” or “peace” carry with them something more than a simple description of a state of affairs, a mere conceptual content (Stevenson, 1944, p. 210). These words are “ethical”: they have a “magnetic” effect (Stevenson, 1937, p. 16), an

imperative force, a tendency to influence the interlocutor's decisions (Stevenson, 1937, pp. 18-19). In the modern psychological terminology, we can say that these terms carry "emotional valence" (Frijda & Mesquita, 2000, p. 49): at the same time, they presuppose and trigger a value judgment that can lead to an emotion.

In politics and other domains of human communication, these terms play a crucial role (Schiappa, 2003; Zarefsky, 2004). They change the evaluation of a state of affairs, and modify the interlocutor's attitudes and choices concerning it. They hide the complexity of a judgment on a complex entity or event, providing the hearer with a pre-packaged suggested evaluation, an allegedly objective representation pointing out only specific ethical (or rather evaluative) dimensions. These powerful instruments of persuasion raise problems that exceed the domain of rhetoric and argumentation, but that are crucial for understanding the mechanism of the rhetorical effect that they trigger. How can a word be emotive? How can value judgments be related to emotions? Why are emotions used to affect decisions?

The answers to these questions need to be searched for in the analysis of the complex structure of emotions and the reasoning mechanisms that have been investigated under the label of "heuristics" or "peripheral processes" (Petty *et al.*, 2004; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

## 2. THE POWER AND THE USES OF EMOTIVE WORDS

Attacking the competing parties and politicians is a strategy that is frequently used during the elections in many countries. However, in the 2013 Italian presidential elections the number and the originality of the attacks were unusual. As a matter of fact, three individuals dominated the scene, showing an incredible creativity in forging new epithets for depicting their (possible) rivals in a negative manner: Beppe Grillo, leader of the Movimento 5 Stelle, Silvio Berlusconi, the politician who ruled the country for the last 18 years, and Mario Monti, the outgoing prime minister. While the political campaign of Grillo was centered on public speeches, organized as polemic and comic shows, Berlusconi heavily relied on advertisements and programs on the several mass media of his property (TV channels, newspapers, magazines...) and ads sent by ordinary mail. Finally, Monti did not organize a massive political campaign, but rather released interviews in which he explained his program.

The communication tactics of the three parties mirror the type of strategy adopted, and the type of *ethos*, or rather communicative character, of the person representing them. Grillo acted as a comic actor and polemical public speaker, defending his positions by pointing out the critical issues of the political and economic behavior in Italy in a funny and entertaining fashion. Monti, as a famous professor and economist, underscored the economic problems of the country, proposing a program to face them. Berlusconi acted as the victim of a conspiracy aimed at discrediting him and, at the same time, he also embodied the prototypical ideals of the stereotypical Italian male.

The attack strategies grounded on emotive words varied noticeably depending on the politician. Grillo used the strategy of amplification (Quintiliani *Institutio Oratoria*, VI, 2, 23-30; Calboli Montefusco, 2004), namely the classification

of an entity or an event using indignant language (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II, 24, 3), based on a slight manipulation of circumstances or facts that are or can be commonly accepted. Quintilian illustrated this tactic with the example of a dishonest man turned into a “robber”, or the wounds of another transformed into a simple injury (*Institutio Oratoria*, VIII, 4, 1). The strategy of distorting reality is based on the similarity between the altered image of reality and what is commonly regarded as real. The effectiveness of this dialogical move can be enhanced by combining the distortion with other communicative tactics. Grillo exploits in particular one of them, the use of the comic role. His characterization of the opponents are funny, exaggerated, and at the same time they place the interlocutor in a scenario in which the boundary between reality and fiction is blurred (Meyer, 2000; Smith & Voth, 2002), and lead the interlocutor to a negative judgment based on a limited dimension of the issue. For instance we can consider his description of the left-wing opponent, Pier Luigi Bersani<sup>1</sup>:

Case 1

Bersani “is not a fascist. He is only a loser. But I accuse him of having made arrangements with former fascists and masons for twenty years, sharing among them also the bones of this Country”.

In this case, his attack is highly emotional and based on heavy exaggerations. He uses words such as “fascist” and “mason”<sup>2</sup>, he describes him as a “loser” and depicts his actions as “sharing the bones of a country”. However, the grounds of his attack are or can be shared by the audience, as Bersani directly or indirectly supported members of the Parliament having strong right-wing positions or connections with masonic organizations (illegal in Italy). A similarly charged description is provided on the right-wing (Lega Nord) politician, Roberto Maroni:

Case 2

He is a dreaming barbarian. He always dreams of fooling us.

In this case, Grillo amplifies the poorly refined manners of the politician and its party in general, adding a comment on his real intentions. The strategy of reducing a person to few adjectives the negative traits allows the audience to draw an easy value judgment on him, grounded on likely facts that can be also unknown to someone in the public. For instance, he describes the Fiat CEO, Sergio Marchionne (a figure extremely relevant for the Italian economy and employment, often involved in political discussions) taking for granted the fact that he has his residence in Switzerland. In this fashion, Grillo depicts him as a foreigner plunderer:

Case 3

A Swiss citizen who wears a cashmere jersey and pursues the policy of disintegrating the Italian industry.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/interni/ebetino-fallito-salma-tutto-grillo-insulto-insulto-834396.html> (Retrieved on 4 March 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Masonry is illegal in Italy, and frequently related with high-level criminal organizations.

These descriptions are extreme and funny. They provide a clear clue for an easy value judgment, based on the emphasis on few negative traits (other of his descriptions involve calling Berlusconi “the bouncing dwarf” and Monti “father Merrin”, the priest in the Exorcist) and the omission of other positive achievements or qualities. However, the audience expects the use of such extravagant epithets from a showman known for his comic-political shows. The force and grounds of the attack are considered in a type of dialogue different from the real one, marked by jokes and exaggerations aimed at entertaining.

A completely different approach can be found in Monti’s statements. He is not joking at all; on the contrary, he acts pursuant to his character and his role of economist, statesman and intellectual. He grounds his attacks, mostly directed against Berlusconi, on emotional and sour descriptions. For instance we can consider the following statement<sup>3</sup>:

Case 4

“Berlusconi continues making promises, trying to buy the votes of the Italian people with the money of the Italian people.” [...] According to Monti, “this can lead to popularity, but this would be a challenge for a Country that is basically without memory. I do not want to believe that the Italians do not remember their past”.

Here, Monti accuses Berlusconi of buying the votes of the Italians, and at the same time poisons the well of his possible supporters, classifying them as “people without memory” (referring to the disastrous conditions of Italian economy left by Berlusconi’s government). In another interview he explicitly pointed out the mismanagement of his predecessor, claiming to be distressed when “some jackasses say that they have left Italy in good conditions in 2011.”<sup>4</sup> This attack is aimed at arousing both anger against his opponent (Berlusconi is deceiving and stealing for his own interest) and contempt towards the supporters thereof (people without memory are like puppets). The emotion of anger is combined with fear in the following similitude drawn between Berlusconi and the Pied Piper<sup>5</sup>:

Case 5

According to the outgoing prime minister, the promises made by Silvio Berlusconi “are similar to the Pied Piper of Hamelin who lures away the mice. The fact that the Italians can believe to some words stated by *that* mouth reminds me of the Pied Piper, who takes the mice to drown”, said the professor. He admits: Berlusconi “has already deceived the Italian people three times. The first time I was also deceived.”

Here, Monti underscores the deceitful and treacherous character of Berlusconi by

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unita.it/italia/monti-nega-nessuna-spaccatura-su-voto-disgiunto-1.482792> (Retrieved on 3 March 2012).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2013-02-15/monti-interviene-inchieste-questi-082340.shtml?uud=AbN2sdUH> (Retrieved on 3 March 2012).

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2013/01/14/news/monti\\_situazione\\_grave\\_colpa\\_di\\_chi\\_ha\\_governato\\_prima-50540745/](http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2013/01/14/news/monti_situazione_grave_colpa_di_chi_ha_governato_prima-50540745/) (Retrieved on 3 March 2012).

describing his promises as aimed at “luring” the Italians to disaster and “deceiving” them. He points out his unjust and detrimental actions against the people to trigger anger, while the story of the Pied Piper is intended to underline the danger through the fear for the possible consequences.

The reaction of Berlusconi to this attack follows the character that he plays, characterized by victimization (he is the victim of an injustice and a conspiracy) and closeness to *his* idea of the stereotypical Italian man (aggressive, womanizer, vulgar and soccer fan) (emphasis added)<sup>6</sup>:

Case 6

“Who claims this is a *scumbag*; this is an action of a *scumbag*, as the spread is something that is independent from everything. These are the claims of the left wing; these are *lies*, it is not the truth”. Berlusconi raises his voice and states again that “this this part of the *conspiracy*, as they wanted to clear a government away in order to pursue the interest of the other European countries.” And then concerning the “pied piper”: “I, a pied piper? He also *deceived* us, and this is a real *hoax* and we have been all *deceived*. We hoped that this man were what he appeared to be. Probably he also wants to tax my “pipe”...”

The vulgar and ungrounded epithets (in another interview he called Monti a “madman”<sup>7</sup>) and the off-color joke are aimed at showing a resemblance between the billionaire and the ordinary man (or at least the prototype depicted by him). The indignant language, taking for granted the falsity of the claims of a famous economist (“these are lies”) and a secret plan of the other European countries (“conspiracy”), is intended to convey the simple picture of a victim, to be sympathized with. He then replies to Monti’s attack (which was actually grounded on economic figures) by accusing him of deceiving the people. However, different from Monti’s remarks, Berlusconi’s counterattack is not grounded on any reason, except for the popular dissatisfaction with the austerity measures.

In this political debate also Berlusconi’s criminal charges (and convictions) could have played an important role, but the leader of the right-wing coalition managed to present them as part of the conspiracy against him (emphasis added)<sup>8</sup>:

Case 7

“The judges of the court of Milan should be tried, as they are *horrible defamation machines*. It is a true scandal”. Then Berlusconi added that Ms. Bocassini <the public Prosecutor> “should be tried for her use of the resources of the state to *set up an inexistent accusation*.” “It is a *barbarous* country, in which one is accused of indirect support to the Mafia only because one goes to a dinner. We have reached a level of *sickness* that we need to defeat now”.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.ilmessaggero.it/primopiano/politica/berlusconi\\_monti\\_sotto\\_choc/notizie/244357.shtml](http://www.ilmessaggero.it/primopiano/politica/berlusconi_monti_sotto_choc/notizie/244357.shtml) (Retrieved on 3 March 2012).

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.unita.it/italia/berlusconi-l-anm-insorge-nessuna-barbarie-1.459541> (Retrieved on 3 March 2012).

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.ilmessaggero.it/primopiano/politica/berlusconi\\_monti\\_sotto\\_choc/notizie/244357.shtml](http://www.ilmessaggero.it/primopiano/politica/berlusconi_monti_sotto_choc/notizie/244357.shtml) (Retrieved on 3 March 2012).

With his emotive epithets, Berlusconi takes for granted ungrounded facts (the judges aim at discrediting honest citizens; the charges against him are false) and arouses anger against what he calls the “dictatorship of the public prosecutors.” His blatant denial of proved facts and previous judgments cannot be based on reasons. For this reason, he simply amplifies the alleged injustice of the Italian legal system and minimizes the charges pressed against him and his collaborators (the connections with Mafia become “dinners”).

These examples show how emotive words can be used as instrument for providing the interlocutor with an emotional description, namely a representation aimed at arousing an emotive reaction. This reaction is interconnected with a value judgment, in the sense that at the same it presupposes such an evaluation and leads the interlocutor to draw it through the emotion. However, this tactic is not as simple as it appears to be. The three political characters use the same instrument of persuasion within different more complex strategies. The emotional epithets were accepted within Grillo’s comic role as part of hilarious caricatures. Monti’s sour remarks are grounded on his presupposed and commonly shared authority and superior knowledge. Berlusconi uses emotive words to turn the political confrontation into a street fight, where the criticisms against his political figure become attacks against himself as an ordinary man<sup>9</sup>. His acting mirrors the impulsive and indignant reaction of an unjustly offended person.

Emotive words can have a noticeable impact on the audience’s judgments and decisions. In order to analyze their effectiveness, it is necessary to take into consideration two distinct and connected dimensions of this instrument: their logical function as implicit and condensed arguments, and their rhetorical effect consisting in arousing emotions.

### 3. THE ARGUMENTATIVE STRUCTURE OF EMOTIVE WORDS

Stevenson defined emotive words as words “that involve a wedding of descriptive and emotive meaning”, and have the power of directing attitudes (Stevenson, 1944, p. 210). These words are used to refer to a fragment of reality, but at the same time they have the tendency to encourage future actions (Stevenson, 1938, p. 49-50) and lead the hearer towards a change by affecting his system of interests (Stevenson, 1944, p. 210). This tendency amounts to a disposition of such terms to be used to achieve a specific effect, to move the hearer and change his attitude towards action. Stevenson’s account can be analyzed from two distinct perspectives. On the one hand, it is possible to investigate the structure of the reasoning leading from the predication of a word to a reason to act. On the other hand, it is necessary to analyze what makes a word “magnetic” (as Stevenson describes the emotive meaning), namely strongly encouraging a course of action.

The first step consists in inquiring into what links a word to a possible choice, and for this reason we need to build on the logical approaches to ethical judgments (Toulmin, 1950; von Wright, 1963a; 1963b; Hare, 1963; Kupperman, 2002). On this

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<sup>9</sup> This tactic was also used when he explained he some open criticisms to his politics as attacks from the supporters of Juventus (“they must be supporters of Juventus!”), the rival of the team he owns.

view, ethical judgments are means to lead the interlocutor to action on the basis of common knowledge (a commonly accepted rule of behavior) and criteria of classification (what is a good action, a good goal, or more simply a good car, etc.). These two components are strictly combined (Hare, 1963, p. 24):

Let us imagine a society which places a negative value upon industry; there seem to be such societies in the world, in which the industrious man is regarded as a mere nuisance. Such a society could never (if it spoke English) express its moral standards by using the word 'industrious', like us, for commending people, only with a totally different descriptive meaning—i.e. commending them for totally different qualities, for example that of doing as little work as possible. If they did that, we should say that they had changed the meaning of the English word 'industrious'. The descriptive meaning of 'industrious' is much too firmly attached to the word for this sort of thing to be allowed; these people would be much more likely to use the word in its normal descriptive meaning, but neutrally or pejoratively; i.e. to give it no, or an adverse, prescriptive meaning.

Depending on what is considered to be desirable for a given community, the classification of a state of affairs, an action or a behavior as “good” varies. This perspective is rooted in the Aristotelian ethical system, which regards every decisions as always aimed to a goal, which amounts to what is good (or better), or what appears to be good (or better) (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1113a 15), “for everything aims at the good” (the desirable, *ταγαθου*) (*Topics* 116a, 18; see Burnyeat, 1980, p. 83). This account underscores the crucial importance of the principles of inference (specific *loci*) that we use to judge something as desirable or more desirable, or, on the contrary, undesirable or more undesirable (*Rhetoric*, 1362b 2-18). Together with the ideal and philosophical principles of value judgments, based on what shall be considered as proper for the nature of man, Aristotle provides more practical, or rather rhetorical, criteria, grounded on what is usually the case among people. On this view, values, or principles of choice, are structured in hierarchies (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1951) depending on a man’s culture and personal dispositions:

Further, a man of a given disposition makes chiefly for the corresponding things: lovers of victory make for victory, lovers of honour for honour, money-loving men for money, and so with the rest. These, then, are the sources from which we must derive our means of persuasion about Good and Utility. (*Rhetoric* 1363b 1-5)

In the same way also it is in certain places honourable to sacrifice one’s father, e.g. among the Triballi, whereas, absolutely, it is not honourable. Or possibly this may indicate a relativity not to places but to persons: for it is all the same wherever they may be: for everywhere it will be held honourable among the Triballi themselves, just because they are Triballi. Again, at certain times it is a good thing to take medicines, e.g. when one is ill, but it is not so absolutely (*Topics* 115b 19-27).

Classifying a state of affairs or an entity as “good” or “bad”, or rather “desirable” or “undesirable” depends on considerations about the nature of the thing itself, but also on the purpose in relation to which a thing is regarded as good or bad. For instance, a man can consider a knife as good, as it cuts well, while another can consider it as bad, as it is dangerous or not nice (von Wright, 1963a).

On this perspective, values can be thought of as the reasons for classifying

something as desirable or not, and at the same reasons for action. By pointing out the qualities of a course of action, an event or an object known to fall within the categories of the interlocutor’s “desirable or undesirable things”, the speaker can provide him with a reason to act in a specific fashion. This process of reasoning is twofold. On the one hand, the speaker needs to classify a state of affairs as falling within a value. On the other hand, the desirability of a state of affairs triggers a pattern of reasoning leading a decision to act. The first type of reasoning can be described as a passage from the commitment to a specific abstract goal (honesty shall be praised/sought after) to the commitment to a specific one (this man shall be praised/supported). This transfer of commitments can be thought of as a passage from some qualities of the state of affairs to its classification according to a value, and another, proceeding from values, from the commitment to an abstract desire to a concrete one. The first step can be represented with the following scheme (Walton, Reed & Macagno, 2008, p. 319):

PREMISE 1:	If some particular thing <i>a</i> can be classified as falling under verbal category <i>C</i> , then <i>a</i> has property <i>V</i> (in virtue of such a classification).
PREMISE 2:	<i>a</i> can be classified as falling under verbal category <i>C</i> .
CONCLUSION:	<i>a</i> has property <i>V</i> .

Argumentation scheme 1: Argument from classification

For instance, if a man ruins willingly his own country, he will be classified as “evil” or “contemptible”, while if someone fights for improving it, he can be classified as “honorable”.

The passage from the instantiation of a value to the specific commitment concerning it can be represented as follows (Walton, Reed & Macagno, 2008, p. 321):

PREMISE 1:	The state of affairs <i>x</i> is <i>positive/negative</i> as judged by agent <i>A</i> according to Value <i>V</i> (value judgment).
PREMISE 2:	The fact that <i>x</i> is <i>positive/negative</i> affects the interpretation and therefore the evaluation of goal <i>G</i> of agent <i>A</i> (If <i>x</i> is <i>good</i> , it supports commitment to goal <i>G</i> ).
CONCLUSION:	The evaluation of <i>x</i> according to value <i>V</i> is a reason for retaining/retracting commitment to goal <i>G</i> .

Argumentation scheme 2: Argument from Values

On this view, if “honor” is praise-worthy (contemptible), also this specific man is praise-worthy (contemptible).

The second component of ethical reasoning is the passage from moral judgment to action. The decision-making process can be thought of as a pattern of reasoning connecting a desired action, or rather a «declaration of intention» or commitment to bringing about a state of affairs (von Wright, 1972, p. 41) with its grounds (Anscombe, 1998, p. 11). A speaker can reason in two distinct fashions (von Wright, 1963b, p. 161; 1963a, Ch. VIII). The first reasoning is from a commitment to bring about a specific state of affairs to the commitment to the productive or necessary means to bring it about (what Abelard would call the consensus, i.e. the decision to engage in a specific (good or bad) activity, aimed at pursuing a specific (good or bad) goal, see Abaelardi *Ethica*, 636 A):

Premise	I (an agent) have a goal <i>G</i> .
Evaluation	Carrying out this action <i>A</i> is a means to realize <i>G</i> (Unless <i>A</i> is brought about, <i>G</i> will not be attained).
Conclusion	Therefore <i>A</i> should (not) be brought about.

Argumentation scheme 3: Practical reasoning

According to this type of reasoning, if my purpose is to support a specific honorable candidate, I can choose among different courses of action, such as voting for him or promoting his ideas among voters, and so on.

A different type of reasoning proceeds from an action which is the necessary or productive cause of a desirable or undesirable state of affairs. We can represent this type of reasoning as the argument from consequences (from Walton, Reed, & Macagno, 2008, p. 332):

Premise	If action <i>Q</i> is brought about, good (bad) consequences will plausibly occur.
Evaluation	Good (bad) consequences are (not) desirable (should (not) occur).
Conclusion	Therefore <i>Q</i> should (not) be brought about.

Argumentation scheme 4: Argument from consequences

For instance, if my choice of voting for a certain party supports the nomination of a contemptible person, I will not vote for such a party (necessary cause). On the contrary, if my support to a certain party results in an honorable person being elected, I will vote for it. These patterns of reasoning need also to take into consideration the so-called foreseeable consequences (von Wright, 1963a, Ch. 6). My goal of having my taxes reduced can be good; however, if the productive cause thereof also results in economic problems for the country or the election of a person unfit to govern the state in which I live, I will be pursuing an unreasonable goal (I choose a hierarchically inferior value over the superior one).

This structure of reasoning that can mirror the quasi-logical dynamic effect of emotive words is complex and requires a noticeable effort, in addition to information that a simple classification cannot provide. However, the ideal rationality is often quite different from reality. Aristotle pointed out that desirable can also be what “appears” to be good. The crucial force of emotive words lies in this subtle difference, which draws the distinction between systematic (or central) and heuristic (or peripheral) reasoning. In order to analyze this other evaluative and decisional process we need to investigate the second dimension of emotive words pointed out above, namely reason why they are “emotive”.

#### 4. EMOTIONS AND WORDS

Why are some words emotive? How can an instrument that represents concepts, commonly used to refer to reality, bring about an emotional state? A possible answer can be found in the cognitivist approaches to emotions. These studies focus on the rational, or rather conceptual, dimension of emotions, showing how they are strictly interwoven (Pugmire, 1998, p. 7). For instance, an emotion of “fear” presupposes a value judgment on what is feared. If it is not considered as undesirable and probable, it cannot be feared (Leighton, 1988, p. 205; Ben Ze’ev, 2000, p. 475). Similarly, anger involves the perception of an offence against the self. Emotions presuppose a specific evaluation of a state of affairs or entity, which makes them essentially different from feelings (De Sousa, 1987). To feel an emotion corresponds to implicitly appraise a state of affairs (Solomon, 2003, pp. 7-8):

[...] emotions are interestingly similar to beliefs. We can now explain this similarity by claiming that emotions are judgments – normative and often moral judgments. “I am angry at John for taking (“stealing” begs the question) my car” entails that I believe that John has somehow wronged me [...]. The moral judgment entailed by anger is not a judgment about my anger [...]. My anger is that judgment. If I do not believe that I have somehow been wronged, I cannot be angry (though I might be upset, or sad). Similarly, if I cannot praise my lover, I cannot be in love (though I might want her or need her, which, traditional wisdom aside, is entirely different). If I do not find my situation awkward, I cannot be ashamed or embarrassed. If I do not judge that I have suffered a loss, I cannot be sad or jealous. [...] emotions in general do appear to require this feature: to have an emotion is to hold a normative judgment about one’s situation

Emotions can be defined by considering their appraisal component and their action tendency (Pugmire, 2005, p. 16; Keltner & Lerner, 2010, p. 324). The first component corresponds to the “evaluative judgments of whether an event is good or bad and whether people’s current actions and environment correspond to their personal goals and expectations” (Keltner & Lerner, 2010, p. 315). The second component is the organizing principle that motivates specific behaviors or reactions. For instance, the emotion of fear will result in a tendency to flee or reduce uncertainty, while anger will lead the agent to restore justice. The value judgment (or rather the cognitive change) is the reason for a physical and psychical reaction that can drive us to action (Frijda & Mesquita, 2000, p. 46).

The relationship between value judgments and emotions highlights another

important characteristic of emotional appraisal, i.e. its cultural dependence (Keltner & Lerner, 2010, p. 327). As emotions are grounded on value judgments, and values are placed in hierarchies that depend on the culture and the individual disposition, emotions are also influenced by culture (Smith & Lazarus, 1990, p. 627). An individual's past experiences become criteria for evaluating a state of affairs as good or not (Damasio, 1994, p. 246). However, culture embodies the experiences of a community, and in this fashion provides the criteria for the evaluative judgment (see Frijda & Mesquita, 1998). On this perspective, an emotion is in part culture-dependent, as it is "a system of concepts, beliefs, attitudes, and desires, virtually all of which are context-bound, historically developed, and culture-specific" (Solomon, 2003, p. 87). The same action or fact can be considered as offensive in one culture (and trigger anger) and not-offensive in another (Frijda & Mesquita, 2000, pp. 59-61).

The strict relationship between value judgments, culture and emotion is the ground of the rhetorical construction of emotions, in which emotive words play an essential role. Quintilian underscored the function that the "vivid representation" has in discourse (see also the notion of "vividness effect" described by Frijda, 1998, p. 276). The orator should amplify some details of a state of affairs to add "additional force to things unjust, cruel or hateful", so that he can awaken "emotions which either do not naturally arise from the case or are stronger than the case would suggest" (*Institutio Oratoria*, VI, 2, 26-30). Words can be used to depict a scene that resembles reality, or that is similar to a situation related with the audience's experiences and memories. The likeliness of the image triggers an immediate value judgment, resulting in an emotion (*Institutio Oratoria*, VI, 2, 29-31):

But how are we to generate these emotions in ourselves, since emotion is not in our own power? I will try to explain as best I may. There are certain experiences which the Greeks call φαντασῖαι, and the Romans visions, whereby things absent are presented to our imagination with such extreme vividness that they seem actually to be before our very eyes. It is the man who is really sensitive to such impressions who will have the greatest power over the emotions. Some writers describe the possessor of this power of vivid imagination, whereby things, words and actions are presented in the most realistic manner, by the Greek word ευφαντασῖωτος; and it is a power which all may readily acquire if they will. [...] I am complaining that a man has been murdered. Shall I not bring before my eyes all the circumstances which it is reasonable to imagine must have occurred in such a connexion? Shall I not see the assassin burst suddenly from his hiding-place, the victim tremble, cry for help, beg for mercy, or turn to run? Shall I not see the fatal blow delivered and the stricken body fall? Will not the blood, the deathly pallor, the groan of agony, the death-rattle, be indelibly impressed upon my mind?

These words and descriptions do not simply inform us. They make us experience a specific emotion, something we can perceive as real, an "apparent reality" that is present to our senses and we cannot doubt of (Frijda & Mesquita, 2000, p. 69; Clore & Gasper, 2000, p. 26). The audience cannot doubt of the anger that it feels against the merciless assassin described by Quintilian. For this reason, his deeds, his cruelty, his hatefulness are apparently real. On this perspective, emotive words can be used to "instill beliefs". By providing the audience with an emotional representation of a

person, a group or an issue, it is possible to arouse an emotion, and in this fashion give the interlocutor something more powerful than sheer information or truth: the sensation or the appearance of truth.

Depicting individuals, groups, or issues from an emotional perspective or as actors in emotional events evokes emotions, and the emotions instill the belief constituting its appraisal dimension into the hearers (Frijda & Mesquita, 2000, p. 47). The grammar of emotions becomes the grammar of the emotive words. When Grillo calls Renzi, a left wing politician, “little moron” and Bersani (the leader of the left wing coalition) “a loser that has shared with masons and ex fascists the bones of Italy”, he is not simply telling jokes. His first description is aimed at depicting Renzi as an inferior, triggering contempt, namely the emotion expressing “the subject’s superiority over the object” (Ben Ze’ev, 2000, p. 390). The second funny characterization combines the judgment of Bersani’s inferiority with his allegedly unjust and evil actions, arousing anger and contempt at the same time. Berlusconi does the same when describes Monti as a “scumbag” or a “madman”, or when attacks the judges by calling them “defamation machines” or dictators. Monti’s image of the Pied Piper provides a strongly emotional representation of the alleged dangers in which the Italians are running, awakening fear.

As seen above, emotive words are implicit arguments and instruments for arousing emotions. However, what makes emotive words so powerful in redirecting attitudes and choices? How can the rational dimension of emotions affect the rational assessment of a state of affairs? A possible explanation can be found in the analysis of the kind of reasoning that emotions trigger.

## 5. EMOTIONS AND PERIPHERAL REASONING

Emotions can be instrument for instilling beliefs. They create an apparent reality, something that we perceive as real even if it is not. When we fear a person that deceived the citizens, we strengthen or commit ourselves to that belief. When we feel contempt for a leader, we are led to hold his inferiority as true, even if no evidence is provided. When we hate the officers of a public institution, we do not need further proofs to judge their actions as unjust. Emotions provide us with a picture of reality that is more likely than the one supported by data and proofs.

The reasoning triggered by emotions was clearly described by Quintilian. On his view, the orator should amplify a description to arouse a passion, because passions trigger a form of reasoning that is different from the systematic one. The judge, when overcome by passions, “abandons all attempts to enquire into the truth of the arguments, is swept along by the tide of passion, and yields himself unquestioning to the torrent” (*Institutio Oratoria*, VI, 2, 6). Emotions, as seen above, presuppose and provide the agent with an appearance of reality, an appraisal that is not the result of a careful assessment, but the outcome of an immediate and simplified perception, an interaction between the individual’s concerns and the object (Clare & Gasper, 2000, p. 30).

Emotions make us jump to conclusion, trigger generalizations based on single experiences (Frijda & Mesquita, 2000, p. 55), resulting in attributing a single episodic characteristic (“he looks dangerous”) to inner, essential properties (he his

evil), or extending an event (“he behaved badly”) over time (“he has always been bad”). Such beliefs are strong, as they are felt, and “what is present to the senses cannot easily be doubted to exist” (Frijda & Mesquita, 2000, p. 67). For this reason, emotional judgments are hasty, biased and automatic conclusions of right and wrong (Damasio, 1994; Greene & Haidt, 2002), in the sense that they are not grounded on a sufficient assessment of the information available, nor can they be easily rebutted by more lucid and careful thoughts (Keltner & Lerner, 2010, p. 331). This fast appraisal triggers an immediate action tendency, a sudden decision to act in conformity with the emotion experienced (Loewenstein & Lerner, 2003). This combination of hasty and biased judgment and decision-making attitude characterizes the emotional thinking (Frijda & Mesquita, 2000, p. 64):

Emotion-steered thinking shows four features that may help explain its influence upon beliefs. The first is instrumentality. We entertain thoughts that might help to achieve our emotional goals, and because they might help. Emotional thinking tries to solve the problems posed by the emotional predicament. The second is motivational force. The more urgent our goals, the greater the inclination to do what may help to reach them, including thought. Emotional thinking is driven by emotional urge. The third is control of the scope of thought. Emotional thinking is loath to waste time and energy by attending to irrelevant detail or indulging in complex inferencing. The fourth feature is motivated bias. Emotional thinking is biased towards beliefs that support one's emotional aims, and towards retrieving or generating information that does.

Emotional thinking is extremely powerful because it requires little processing effort by the agent. He has not to carefully evaluate all the evidence concerning complex issues and synthesize it; a momentary feeling can trigger empirical generalizations, leading to strong and persistent value judgments (Keltner & Lerner, 2010, p. 331).

Emotional reasoning has been analyzed as different from the “central” or systematic type of reasoning, which requires effort, time and information (Chen & Chaiken, 1999). Emotions provide the individual with easily accessible information, namely mental contents that immediately come to mind (Kahneman, 2003, p. 699; 706). These accessible contents, constituted by prototypes, stereotypes (namely generalizations accessible because of their emotional valence) or changes affecting one’s emotions spare the individual the effort to process information and result in an easy, heuristic judgment (Kahneman, 2003, p. 716). For instance, the similarity of an object with a prototype results in similar judgment (Kahneman, 2003); the similarity between two emotional experiences results in a judgment on the similarity of the situations or objects triggering them (Clore & Gasper, 2000, p. 26; Petty *et al.*, 2004, p. 86). This fast and easy type of reasoning has been called as peripheral or heuristic route to persuasion (Petty *et al.*, 2005; Chen & Chaiken, 1999). Instead of assessing a political leader based on his achievements, records, or values, which would result in great effort, a person may resort to a much less complex judgment, grounded on a “heuristic attribute that comes more readily to mind” (Kahneman, 2003, p. 707). For instance, the attributes of being a “madman”, a “scumbag”, a “moron”, a “dictator”, a “barbarian” or a “pied piper” come easily to mind, as they have triggered an emotional response. Even when such attributes are

completely irrelevant (“scumbag”) or utterly false (“dictator”, “madman”), they provide us with a criterion, a peripheral route to judgment.

Sometimes emotive words are needed in order to summarize in a condensed argument and principle of heuristic reasoning more complex reasoning. Monti’s choice to engage in the battle of insults can be partially explained by the need of providing the voters with an alternative route to a judgment, a shortcut to his complex economic and political considerations. However, if the appearance of reality is good when it mirrors it, it can become highly deceitful when conceals it (Petty *et al.*, 2005, p. 108):

[...] sometimes the peripheral route might be the only strategy possible. For example, there are some issues or objects for which there are few strong arguments (e.g., imagine trying to sell cigarettes with a high tar content). It is not surprising that in these cases, ads typically contain hardly any information about the merits of the product (because there are none or very few) and instead contain attractive endorsers or majestic scenery.

When arguments supporting honesty or correctness cannot be provided, when judgments based on past records cannot be suggested, when reasons for believing that a candidate is credible or is acting for the good of country cannot be found, the only resort is to take the other route. In this case emotive words are no longer pre-packaged reasoning, but masks, instruments for deceiving. Moreover, the effect of these emotional epithets can be devastating on the other route, the rational one (Loewenstein & Lerner, 2003). The central and systematic process can be affected by various variables (Petty *et al.*, 2005). Emotive words can inhibit the central and more effort-requiring type of reasoning and trigger the other, fast and biased, process (Clore & Gasper, 2000, p. 30):

Once an emotion is experienced, the system no longer operates as a scientist, carefully weighing the pros and cons of the belief implied by the emotion. Instead, the emotional person acts like a prosecutor or a defense lawyer seeking by any means to find evidence for the belief. Presumably, the experiential aspect of the emotion is itself responsible for this process of interrupting the flow, providing information, and, through associated beliefs, guiding attention.

Weak arguments are perceived as stronger when the attention needed for the systematic processing lowers (Petty *et al.*, 2004).

On this perspective, emotive words are instruments of decision making that can be extremely effective. However, just like all powerful instruments, they can be also extremely dangerous. The fragment of reality that they bring to the interlocutor’s attention, the apparent reality that they provide can be a synthesis or a mask. Emotive words can provide a symbolic, summarized reason for a conclusion, but at the same time they can act as strategies for prevent a careful assessment of a situation.

Clearly, when the evidence that such words are simply lies or exaggerations is too clear, the strategy itself risks turning against the speaker. For this reason, other tactics are used to prevent possible criticisms or increase the burden of an attack. Grillo acts in a comic environment, where exaggerations are regarded as

instruments for triggering humor and entertainment. Accusing him of distorting reality with his epithets would be like accusing him of being entertaining. Berlusconi plays between two roles, acting as a light-hearted and mundane entertainer and a serious politician according to his communicative purposes. Moreover, by turning political attacks into a fight of personal insults and playing the indignant and angry role, he manages to shift a debate into a quarrel, twisting the intentions of his opponents.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In the late-medieval dialectical theory, fallacies were described according to two criteria: their reason for the semblance, the plausible appearance that makes the people assent to the argument, and a reason for the failure, for their being weak or invalid (Kretzmann, Kenny, & Pinborg, 1982, p. 124). Emotive words provide an appearance of reality, a perception of a state of affairs that makes them instruments for easily drawing a value judgment in conditions of lack of time, resources or information. However, the same semblance of reality can be used to replace it with a distorted image, and lead the interlocutor to a judgment based on irrelevant or false attributes. The inner rationality of these words fades away when peripheral thinking takes the place of the systematic one.

Emotive words are powerful and dangerous instruments, both for the audience and for the speaker. For this reason, they are often combined with side tactics that leave unaltered their rhetorical (persuasive) effect while affecting their dialectical and dialogical force. A comic actor cannot be accused of exaggerating or being irrelevant, an angry man cannot be blamed for being aggressive or voicing his personal opinions (even if publically and when acting as a public figure).

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