THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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THE STRATEGIC DIMENSION OF THE ERISTIC DIALECTIC IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GENERAL THEORY OF CONFRONTATIONAL ACTS AND SITUATIONS

Reflection on the topic of eristic, or the art of persuading others that our arguments are right in the course of verbal disputes, has a long tradition which dates back to Antiquity. Greeks worshipped the goddess Eris, who they believed inspired the mythical war between the Achaeans and Trojans. Plato paid considerable attention to the art of discussion and employed specific polemic schemes constructing his dialogues. Aristotle also addressed this topic profusely in many parts of his work, in particular in the treatise entitled *On Sophistical Refutations*.[1]

Considerations on discussions and on what makes discussions successful have occupied peoples' minds throughout the ages and assumed different forms. For centuries it accompanied reflection on superstition and fallacies, as evidenced, for instance, in the contributions by Francis Bacon, Isaac Watts, Jeremy Bentham or Immanuel Kant (Walton, 1999: 7 ff.).

Tadeusz Kotarbiński wrote in the introduction to the Polish edition of *Eristische Dialektik oder Die Kunst, Recht zu behalten* by Schopenhauer that the art of discussion should be approached as a kind of fight. According to Kotarbiński, the theory of discussion should be embedded in a broader area of the "general theory of confrontational

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[1] Aristotle resolved to dedicate his treatise to the cataloguing and identification of the types of reasoning which only appear to be correct, and therefore are frequently used in order to mislead those who are unable to recognize that they are erroneous. The Stagirite starts his treatise saying: "That some reasonings are genuine, while others seem to be so but are not, is evident. This happens with arguments, as also elsewhere, through a certain likeness between the genuine and the sham. For physically some people are in a vigorous condition, while others merely seem to be so by blowing and rigging themselves out as the tribesmen do their victims for sacrifice; and some people are beautiful thanks to their beauty, while others seem to be so, by dint of embellishing themselves." He goes on to list the reasons why one can/should examine allegedly correct reasonings: "Now for some people it is better worth while to seem to be wise, than to be wise without seeming to be (for the art of the sophist is the semblance of wisdom without the reality, and the sophist is one who makes money from an apparent but unreal wisdom); for them, then, it is clearly essential also to seem to accomplish the task of a wise man rather than to accomplish it without seeming to do so. To reduce it to a single point of contrast it is the business of one who knows a thing, himself to avoid fallacies in the subjects which he knows and to be able to show up the man who makes them; and of these accomplishments the one depends on the faculty to render an answer, and the other upon the securing of one. Those, then, who would be sophists are bound to study the class of arguments aforesaid: for it is worth their while: for a faculty of this kind will make a man seem to be wise, and this is the purpose they happen to have in view" (Aristotle).

situations and activities." He exemplified endeavors to develop the latter by pointing to a study entitled *Toward a Praxeological Theory of Conflict* by Norman Bailey (Bailey: 1081–1112). Importantly, according to Kotarbiński, Bailey "calls for a thorough examination of the methods of the possibly most efficient handling of what is useful in a confrontation, understood as the combined activities of at least two parties who pursue discordant goals" (Kotarbiński, 1973: 6). This characteristic allows to claim that Bailey's approach is somewhat selective and suggests to think about confrontations primarily in terms of tactics.

The tactical approach to eristic is also developing now, as evidenced by numerous contemporary studies on different aspects of discussing (e.g. Budzyńska-Daca, Kwosek, 2009; Kampka, 2014; Lewiński, 2012). The work by Marek Kochan entitled *Pojedynek na słowa. Techniki erystyczne w publicznych sporach* [Word duel. Eristic techniques in public disputes] (Kochan, 2005) is a particularly pronounced example of this trend. Kochan says in his book that his intention is not only to complement and update the catalogue of stratagems that Schopenhauer wrote about ("This book is based on a canon developed by Schopenhauer, who also relied on the works of his predecessors, including Aristotle, and attempts to update the catalogue of eristic tricks used in modern debates, both those in the media and those conducted in front of a direct audience;" Kochan, 2005: 12). Additionally, he also proposes to review the steps that may be taken in order to block the attacks of an opponent who is using specific kinds of eristic manipulation ("*Pojedynek na słowa…* is not a handbook for demagogues. The descriptions of tricks which at least partly serve the purpose of manipulating the interlocutor and recipient is intended also as a warning, and to demonstrate the means of defense;" Kochan, 2005: 12). However, Kochan's book is one of many guidebooks giving a frog's-eyeview on conducting discussions driven by their participants' ill will. This type of literature suggests looking at an interlocutor as a creator of an obstacle course, in which obstacles must be avoided or overcome. At the same time, the book ignores the broader context of communication events, instead offering tips on what tactics to use when a certain event occurs in the course of a dispute (a similar aim is attempted in the English adaptation of *The Eristic Dialectic* edited by Min Liu; readers are encouraged to buy this work in the following manner: "The NEW Art of Being Right is a modern reimagining of Arthur Schopenhauer's classic *The Art of Being Right*, a classic, but difficult-to-understand tome about the *art of the debate*. The NEW Art of Being Right makes Schopenhauer's 38 strategies for winning arguments (i) EASIER TO UNDERSTAND and (ii) MORE MODERN by using CURRENT EXAMPLES of the 38 strategies. In addition, The NEW Art of Being Right also provides ADDITIONAL CONTENT AND COMMENTARY not available in the original work. In this book, you will learn Schopenhauer's *framework of arguments* and the 38 strategies for how to persuade and influence others, and defeat and outwit your opponents. Diversions, indirect refutations, and other "tricks" are covered in easy to understand language and modernized examples. NEVER let someone else (including haters, trolls, enemies, and your frenemies) get the best of you again in a debate, verbal confrontation, online comment battle, press conference, or flame war!;" Min Liu, 2016; *The New Art of Being Right…*).

Modern studies dedicated to eristic typically ignore the more comprehensive general characteristics of the art of discussion. Current considerations on its principles do

not inspire readers to perceive discussions and plan them as a highly contextual act. Consequently, one can easily stumble upon works which oversimplify the issue, making it impossible to perceive commitment to conversation as a strategic activity.

This deficiency can sometimes influence the interpretation of the classic approach to this issue. Consequently, publications which demand profound study are oftentimes read in haste and without due attention, with the sole purpose of finding only those aspects which can apparently be used at once in confrontations with others. This is what often happens to the above-mentioned unfinished work by Schopenhauer, *The Eristic Dialectic*.

The original title of the work, *Eristische Dialektik oder die Kunst, Recht zu behalten,* discusses being right and allows at least two different interpretations of the field on which Schopenhauer attempted to shed some light (Schopenhauer, 2014). "Recht zu behalten" [being right] may be interpreted as a situation in which a participant in a discussion succeeds in maintaining the audience's confidence in his being right. However, it is also possible to claim that 'being right' is about setting conditions in which the parties of disputes can and want to address one another, the audience, and the topic under discussion in the appropriate manner and following relevant principles.

This duality is well rendered by the English title of Schopenhauer's work: *The Art of Being Right* (Schopenhauer). However, there is also another interpretation whereby the German *Eristische Dialektik oder die Kunst, Recht zu behalten* is translated as *The Art of Controversy*. The latter translation allows eristic to be perceived exclusively in terms of a confrontation whose parties intend to prove that the opponent is wrong (even if he or she is actually right).[2] This restricted meaning is even more prominent in the translation into Polish, which has long been titled *Erystyka czyli sztuka prowadzenia sporów* [Eristic or the art of conducting disputes] (Schopenhauer, 1973).

The above is highly symptomatic and corresponds with the general belief that Schopenhauer's study is in fact a catalogue of 38 stratagems used in order to manipulate the opponent and the audience in the course of discussion. Another frequently stressed fact is a general division of counterarguments into modes and courses, whereas a much more significant issue is ignored, which Schopenhauer addresses towards the end, where he writes: "The only safe rule, therefore, is that which Aristotle mentions in the last chapter of his *Topica:* not to dispute with the first person you meet, but only with those of your acquaintance of whom you know that they possess sufficient intelligence and self-respect not to advance absurdities; to appeal to reason and not to authority, and to listen to reason and yield to it; and, finally, to cherish truth, to be willing to accept reason even from an opponent, and to be just enough to bear being proved to be in the wrong, should truth lie with him. From this it follows that scarcely one man in a hundred is worth your disputing with him. You may let the remainder say what they please, for everyone is at liberty to be a fool – *desipere est jus gentium*. Remember what Voltaire says: *La paix vaut encore mieux que la vérité*. Remember also an Arabian proverb which tells us that on the tree of silence there hangs its fruit,

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[2] There is one more translation variety of this title on the English market: *The Art of Always Being Right* (Schopenhauer, ed. and intr. by A. C. Grayling: 2014) – word *always* definitely restricts us to the second interpretation, taking us in the direction of the eristic dialectic being understood as an art in which admitting to one's error is absolutely ruled out.

which is peace" (Schopenhauer, *The Art of Controversy*).[3] In light of the above, there is a fundamental choice to be made by every potential interlocutor: to discuss or not to discuss. This is the very issue which opens the door to strategic thinking in the field of the art of discussion.

As opposed to tactical reflections, strategic thinking appears to be broader and deeper, and to concern the major reasons for and outcomes of a given act of eristic. It allows tricks to be seen not as means of persuasion but as manifestations of human interaction in the aftermath of essential communication choices made by the parties. Such a classification leads to the question of the boundary conditions which make a discussion successful.

Boundary conditions were discussed by Roman Ingarden in his *Książeczka o człowieku* [Little book on human being]. In his endeavors to define what makes a discussion 'fruitful,' he noted that: (1) discussion "cannot be only formally free;" (2) it should "stem from the genuine internal need of all participants and [should] be conducted while all of them retain their internal freedom." According to Ingarden, this internal freedom emerges "from the need to verify statements encountered or internal beliefs by way of critical and unbiased reasoning." This need may be fulfilled provided that the preliminary condition of the exchange of opinions being reliable is fulfilled. For this purpose, the parties should "suspend […] their own beliefs, claims and even their beloved convictions in order to enter discussion being utterly prepared to recognize a different opinion rather than intending to enforce one's own opinion on others," and be ready to "accurately and faithfully" understand the opponent's standpoint "before resolving to reject or accept it." Ingarden finds these conditions to be the necessary minimum requirements for a discussion to be held "with equal rights, equal effort and equal reliability", thereby avoiding a discussion which is a discussion in name only (Ingarden, 1998: 173–175).

Furthermore, strategic thinking in the field of the art of discussion demands that farreaching goals which may be attained by discussion be considered. Such considerations, however, must not be limited to the mere identification of these goals, nor of the means to attain them. They should also encompass taking into consideration the side effects, both positive and negative, which are likely to be produced in the aftermath of a certain sequence of events.

In order to identify and characterize basic discussion strategies it is worthwhile to start with the definition of the argumentative statements coined by Krzysztof Szymanek, Krzysztof A. Wieczorek, and Andrzej S. Wójcik. According to them, an "[an] argumentative statement uses some statements (*premises*) in order to justify another statement which is controversial by assumption (*conclusion*). The composition of statements encompassing the premises and the conclusions and extracted from an argumentative statement is named *argument* (*argument included in the statement*)" (Szymanek, Wieczorek, Wójcik, 2003: 9).

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[3] Although this edition was prepared on the basis of a translation by T. Bailey Saunders it was furnished with the formerly criticized, unidimensional title of *The Art of Controversy* (suggested by the translator). Nevertheless, numerous other issues of this work that have been published under the title *The Art of Being Right,* which renders the original ambiguity, end with a brief presentation of the last trick, thereby meaning that it was not considered worthwhile to present the complete text to readers. In this manner, readers of the English translation of this work may stumble upon the full text bearing an unfortunate title, or translations which, under a fortunate title, do not present the entire text. Since readers rarely compare different editions of the same book, or verify the accuracy of translation, they are typically doomed to one of the two distortions.

The authors of the above concept stress the fact that the conclusion is controversial by assumption. It is also assumed that premises are not controversial. Thus, disputants adopt two hypotheses forming their argumentative statements. One is that the audience to which the argument is addressed does not consider the conclusion to be obvious, thus requiring the speakers to justify their claims and convince the audience of their correctness. The other is the belief that the audience will accept the premises, thereby approving of the conclusion. These two hypotheses result in arguments which are uncertain in two respects. The speakers may be wrong both about the controversial nature of the conclusion and about the non-controversial nature of premises. If they are wrong about at least one of those, their strategy will be implemented on the basis of an erroneous identification of the context.

There are three possible variations of argumentative strategies employed on the basis of erroneous assumptions made by the disputants. Firstly, the person presenting the argument may erroneously assume that the conclusion of the message is controversial for the audience. In such circumstances, the disputant is frequently perceived as someone who does not understand certain facts, or as naïve. Such a lack of knowledge leading him or her to discuss matters which do not raise any controversy typically results in the audience's disengagement. They perceive the disputant as ignorant and therefore incompetent and uninteresting. Therefore, the audience will not pay attention, or may become irritated due to the fact that their time is being wasted.

In other circumstances, the disputant is confident that he or she have selected convincing premises which, however, turn out to be as dubious as the conclusion itself. In this context, the disputant is perceived as a radical who has not taken the audience into account. Therefore, the argumentative act may arouse concern, anger or a mixture of these emotions in the audience. The disputant cannot be evaluated as convincing in this context, because he or she is seen as dangerous and alien. The audience frequently feel they should not listen to, but rather oppose those who are pursing to convince them.

The third situation is the most extreme and occurs when the disputant erroneously estimates the attitude of the audience and defends a conclusion which is not controversial to them by means of controversial premises. In such a situation, the audience sees the disputant as both inept and a troublemaker. The disputant may be perceived as being driven by irrational motivations, creating controversy where there is none. This makes the audience assess him or her as dangerous on account of his or her incomprehensible lack of adjustment to reality. People applying this argumentative strategy are frequently perceived as wasting social energy. Under extreme conditions, they can be cast as public enemies or scapegoats.

All three above-mentioned situations are problematic, as they involve inadequate analysis of the context in which an argumentative act is performed. The three solutions which follow are grounded on an accurate analysis of a communication situation in which the disputant can act. Nevertheless, it remains debatable whether the solutions taken into consideration below are worth recommending. It is true that, due to the adequate selection of the argumentative toolkit, they allow to achieve the assumed short- or medium-term objectives. Yet the matter of side effects which may emerge as a result of the objectives achievement remains unresolved. In most general terms, in the argumentative strategies concerned, the disputant plays the role of a person who

only appears to be wrong about (1) the controversial nature of the conclusions they are formulating, (2) the non-controversial nature of premises, or (3) both.

In the first scenario, the disputant pretends to be a naive person who is unaware of the true tensions and conflicts that the audience are interested in. In this manner he or she demonstrates his or her own absentmindedness, thereby inviting the audience to not take him or her seriously. Sometimes it enables the disputant to create a space in which he or she can function in the conditions of relaxed social control. In other situations, the disputant may inspire the audience's sympathy, which sometimes allows him or her to benefit from different manifestations of the audience's good will.

In the second scenario the disputants refers to premises which they expect not to be convincing enough to make the audience accept the conclusion he or she is advocating. Additionally, the justification presented is sometimes more controversial to the audience than the conclusion itself, which is something the disputant has predicted. Here, the disputant plays the role of a provocateur, seeking to raise the audience's resentment about both the arguments and the disputant himself or herself. If this is successful, he or she responds to this resentment by trying to turn it to his or her advantage (for instance stepping into the role of an *enfant terrible* or a person who is discriminated against for no reason).

The third strategy consists of the disputant referring to a non-controversial conclusion and controversial premises. Employing this strategy, the disputant is trying to play the role of an irrational/awkward person who creates problems. For instance, someone may present himself or herself as an alien who cannot understand the customs he or she comes across. It may happen that the audience will interpret this attitude as a challenge. In extreme situations this strategy may lead to the change of dominant views on what should and what should not be seen as controversial. The disputant may then step into the role of a visionary who sees further and knows more and is/was able to really change the world.

All three strategies carry the danger of excessive identification with the role. The disputant who succeeds in his or her argumentative acts may gradually develop a habit of performing in the same way all the time. In the long run, this may result in a situation when specific persuasive and argumentative tricks become second nature to the sender and this manner of creating communicative relations with others becomes intuitive. This can result in the communicative code of the disputant being narrowed down. As a consequence, his or her ability to absorb new argumentative forms and content wanes. The disputant expresses a specific style but loses flexibility and the freedom of searching and creating by himself or herself.

The above six strategies are in contrast with the seventh strategy. This occurs when the disputant presents the audience with a genuinely controversial conclusion, having selected premises which are convincing enough to make the audience accept it. The successful implementation of this strategy is usually the most efficient way of building the disputant's identity, as well as of respecting the audience's identity. On a microscale, this may translate into the formation of deeper interpersonal relations (both cooperative and competitive) in which neither manipulation nor exploitation occurs. On a macroscale, the propagation of this discussion strategy emerges as a significant factor to facilitate social order based on understanding the 'Other.'

The above strategies may be successfully applied to analyze specific communication situations and to try to determine who performs what role in the course of discus-

sion and how they do it. This allows deeper reflection to be conducted on different ways of responding to the attitudes of discussion participants in a given situation.

The issue of the prospects of considerations on the strategies of exchanging arguments is worth addressing. Beyond doubt, broad and deeper reflection in this field is still not satisfactory in the contemporary social sciences, especially in communication studies. However, successful explorations into the strategic aspects of discussion stays highly desirable. Yet an in-depth discussion on how to achieve the above is way beyond the limits of this paper (Hordecki, 2009: 39–52).

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to describe the strategic dimension of the eristic dialectic, which is frequently defined as the art of the dispute. This goal is embedded in reflections on the general theory of confrontational acts and situations. The text stresses the fact that strategic thinking about the art of discussion is not given sufficiently deep consideration. Another observation pertains to the fact that the essence of the strategic design of discussions lies in the analysis of long-term results, which can be attained in the course of the exchange of arguments. At the same time, this analysis must not be limited exclusively to identifying the objectives of the discussion or the means of attaining them. Argumentative strategy also includes reflection on the side effects, both positive and negative, which may be the product of a specific communication practice.

Keywords: general theory of conflicts, eristic dialectics, strategic thinking, strategies of argumentation

WYMIAR STRATEGICZNY DIALEKTYKI ERYSTYCZNEJ W KONTEKŚCIE OGÓLNEJ TEORII DZIAŁAŃ I SYTUACJI KONFLIKTOWYCH

STRESZCZENIE

W tekście podjęto próbę scharakteryzowania wymiaru strategicznego dialektyki erystycznej, często określanej jako sztuka prowadzenia sporów. Realizację powyższego zadania starano się wpisać w przestrzeń refleksji z zakresu ogólnej teorii działań i sytuacji konfliktowych. W ramach tekstu wskazano na fakt, że strategiczne myślenie o sztuce dyskusji pozostaje zjawiskiem, które stale wymaga pogłębionego nad nim namysłu. Wskazano również, że istota strategicznego projektowania dyskusji polega na analizie dalekosiężnych rezultatów, które można osiągać w toku wymiany argumentów. Przy czym, refleksja, o której mowa, nie może ograniczać się tylko i wyłącznie do określenia celów dyskusji, jak również wskazania środków, przy pomocy których mogą być one urzeczywistniane. Strategia argumentacyjna obejmuje również refleksję nad skutkami ubocznymi – zarówno o charakterze pozytywnym, jak i negatywnym – które wystąpić mogą jako następstwo określonej praktyki komunikacyjnej.

Słowa kluczowe: ogólna teoria konfliktu, dialektyka erystyczna, myślenie strategiczne, strategie argumentacyjne