

Eristic and Rhetorical Dogmatism: The Art of Controversy Renewed (Ongoing research)

Introduction:

This document represents a first essay (that may be improved in the future) on Rhetorical Dogmatism. In this piece of writing, I will attempt to identify some stratagems used in our everyday life for the purpose of winning an argument, or propose some others. These stratagems will show how some of us try to always win an argument, showing thereby their love of being right despite of all, and thus, their Rhetorical Dogmatism. This work will represent a continuity of Schopenhauer's work in this domain.

What is Rhetorical Dogmatism? How is it related to Eristic?

Rhetorical Dogmatism is the form of Dogmatism that emerges in a controversy. It is mainly represented by the burning desire of winning an argument by any possible verbal means. Thereby, Eristic is, indeed, the most accurate characterization of Rhetorical Dogmatism in the sense that it is a type of argument in which the debaters quarrel verbally for the sole purpose of entering in conflict with their opponents and beating them by destroying their argumentation with disregard of the truth value of any of the arguments they use, or which are used against them. As the debaters strongly believe in their positions and opinions, in Eristic, they can never assume the probability of themselves being wrong. By thinking so, they end up using several stratagems in order to always be right and satisfy their self-conceit or strong belief in their opinions. Because of this belief induced by the nature of Eristic, I call the attitude accompanying what Schopenhauer named *The Art of Controversy (or The Art of Always Being Right)*, Rhetorical Dogmatism.

The stratagems:

1. *The Void stratagem:*

This type of stratagem, which I call the *Void stratagem*, consists of exhausting the entire opponent's arguments. This technique requires a lot of patience and concentration. The person who uses this stratagem must act like a black hole that will absorb all the opposed arguments without negating any of them or reacting to them. After the argumentative spill, you are sure that your opponent has no rhetorical weapons left, and at that moment, you may fiercely react by countering each argument in a meticulous and analytic way. This stratagem is powerful in the sense that it deprives your opponent from changing any of his thoughts during the controversy. Indeed, debaters have, in general, a certain idea of the arguments they are going to use during the verbal exchange. However, revealing your arguments may push your opponent to change his pre-conceived arguments in function of yours, and this may give him a chance to weaken you. For this reason, pushing the opponent to exhaust all his arguments is a very prudent and wise strategy. When the latter reaches the *Void point* (which is the absolute absence of arguments in this context), the way to winning the argument becomes significantly less circuitous than it may have been otherwise. Even so, the problem with this

stratagem is finding a way to push the opponent to reveal all of his arguments without revealing yours. The most effective solution would be using rhetorical questions, answering laconically, or provoking the opponent by asking him sarcastic questions. Another solution is making psychological projections that might push the opponent to reveal the truth of his thoughts. One way to offset this stratagem is pushing the one who uses it to react, to argue. The best way to prevent the opponent from continuing to use this stratagem is to directly ask him why he does not argue. By doing so, you oblige him either to admit that he has no arguments, or to react. In the first case, you will have obviously won the argument. In the second case, you will have successfully avoided being completely weakened.

2. The Mirror stratagem:

What is the function of a mirror? Reflecting light rays. By analogy, consider yourself as a mirror and the rays as being the arguments of your opponent. This is the main idea: if your opponent uses any argument, use it back against him. This stratagem consists in arguing against someone else using his own arguments. This feedback directly confuses the opponent, in general. Some debaters may feel that you rhetorically mime them while using this stratagem, and they may lose their control. In this situation, their concentration decreases, and their anger may have power over their reasoning abilities, facilitating thereby the way to victory for you. Otherwise, they may try to change their arguments. Typically, this attitude of theirs has as an objective confusing you and pushing you to enter in contradiction as they expect you to repeat or rearticulate their arguments. However, in order to achieve this goal, they have to enter in contradiction first. Thus, the easiest way to fool them is to reflect their arguments until they enter in contradiction. You may use the Mirror stratagem either by rephrasing the arguments of your opponents or by constantly making concessions. If you rephrase the opposed arguments, your opponent may not understand that you are using the arguments he has used against you. Moreover, it would be better not to use them right after he has done so. Besides, if you make any concession, make sure to finish your riposte by a rhetorical question. By doing so, you reduce the opponent's chances to respond effectively. The sole inconvenience of this stratagem is that you may not use any arguments except the opposite arguments since your opponent may attack you using your strategy. This stratagem revolves around the process of breaking the belief that is held by a vast majority of debaters; the belief that their arguments necessarily justify their thesis.

3. The reflexive self-conceit stratagem:

This technique, that I also call the *argumentum ad personam reflexa*, represents a personal attack towards the opponent, but not only him. As the name of the stratagem may suggest, this technique requires you to attack yourself too. In Eristic, when a debater has exhausted all of his arguments, he tends to attack personally his opponent. Thereby, his only target becomes the ego of the opponent. It is commonly believed that destroying the opponent's ego results in winning the argument. Yet, even if this belief is widely justified, it is not always true. Furthermore, this belief is essentially the fundamental power source of the reflexive self-conceit stratagem. Indeed, destroying it results in strongly confusing your opponent. Thus, by breaking this intuitive expectation of your opponent's, you reduce to dust his ultimate stratagem. But, how do we use this stratagem? First, you have to pretend accepting all your opponent's attacks. Second, you have to clearly admit that he is right. (At this step, the opponent is either confused or satisfied with himself.) Third, you have to point out how

vicious and intellectually dishonest it is to personally attack someone, highlighting by this means the weakness degree of your opponent. As a result, you clearly demonstrate your opponent's disability to continue arguing and win the argument. You may give more weight to your argument by explaining that your personal characteristics are not relevant to the debate. Nonetheless, this stratagem requires a lot of patience, resistance and a nearly perfect mastery of your ego.

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