

## On the Legitimacy of Eristic in the Context of Rhetoric

Krzysztof Rojek



<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1831-3956>

This paper is an attempt at a contemporary revision of eristics from the perspective of an allegation of being an immoral art of excuses that is only pretending to be rhetoric, a noble art of striving for the truth which is commonly (since ancient times) formulated against the eristics. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to evaluate the connection between rhetoric and eristics, especially in terms of similarities. The Aristotelian characteristic of eristics has already separated the two, indicating the dishonesty of those who use eristics. Artur Schopenhauer, in turn, diagnoses the term 'disagreement' by pointing out the innate tendency among people to win regardless of the means. Krzysztof Szymanek, on the other hand, strives to justify and, in a way, 'cleanse' the eristics from a part of the pejorative labels, showing mainly its technical dimension and partly combining it with rhetoric in terms of the impact that it has on the auditorium. The educational function of eristics, although it does not constitute its main purpose, allows for an evaluation of the eristics as a component of the art of arguments rather than just a collection of techniques unworthy of a respected speaker.

Keywords: eristic, rhetoric, erist, rhetor, stratagem

---

KRZYSZTOF ROJEK, PhD, Institute of Philosophy, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland; address for correspondence: Instytut Filozofii UMCS, Pl. Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej 4, PL 20-031 Lublin; e-mail: [krzysztof.rojek@mail.umcs.pl](mailto:krzysztof.rojek@mail.umcs.pl)

In the introduction to the paper, I will consider the meaning of the concepts of eristics and rhetoric. It is worth starting the characteristic of the basic terms with the well-known Quintilian maxim: “rhetorica est bene dicendi scientia.”<sup>1</sup> Jakub Lichański points out that the fundamental connection between rhetoric values can be noticed on educational grounds<sup>2</sup>. Oratory is the science of speaking well which can even be described as psychagogy, because it undertakes the task of leading human souls towards the truth, as Plato would have said<sup>3</sup>. Classic philosophers agree with the thesis that the rhetor should follow ethical principles, although the arguments they use are not obliged to be transparent towards the recipient. Not only the ethical goal is important, but also the way we achieve it.

## 1. Introduction

As Lichański indicates, the problem of the connection between rhetoric and values is illustrated more accurately by referring to the rhetor’s pursuit of the truth than by reflecting only on the connection on a conceptual level. By adopting such a methodical assumption, I intend to show that the path of an erist<sup>4</sup> (a person using eristics) does not have to exclude following a similar path to the one rhetors (people using rhetoric) take<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, “Institutio Oratoria,” *LacusCurtius*, 8.03.2024, II.15.38, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/quintilian.html> (accessed: 2.06.2024); Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. Harold Edgeworth Butler, vol. 1 (London; New York: William Heinemann; G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1920), II.15.38.

<sup>2</sup> Jakub Zdzisław Lichański, “Retoryka – wartości: sprzeczność, marzenie czy fakt?,” in: *Retoryka i wartości*, ed. Agnieszka Budzyńska-Daca and Ewa Modrzejewska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2019), 16.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, ed. John Burnet, vol. 2, *Platonis Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903), 261 A, 262 C, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0173%3Atext%3DPhaedrus%3Asection%3D262c> (accessed: 2.06.2024); Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler, vol. 9, *Plato in Twelve Volumes* (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press; William Heinemann Ltd., 1925), 261 A, 262 C.

<sup>4</sup> Sevara Kattakulovna Turabova, “Conceptual and Methodological Approach in the Study of the Logical and Gnoseological Status of the Phenomenon of a Scientific Dispute,” *Procedia of Philosophical and Pedagogical Sciences* 2, no. 8 (2023): 50.

<sup>5</sup> Lichański, “Retoryka – wartości: sprzeczność, marzenie czy fakt?,” 17.

For Artur Schopenhauer, the occurrence of a dispute between individuals is strictly rooted in the meaning of dialectics, which he defines as “the art of disputation”. In turn, an *a priori* reflection on the rules of correct thinking is a subject of logic. A dialectical agreement on joint position requires taking into account various reasons, facts or opinions, which is why Schopenhauer believes that the dialectic is built mostly *a posteriori*. A man by nature wants to be always right, and his innate pride makes him argue with people suggesting a change in his position. “Man is naturally obstinate”<sup>6</sup> which exacerbates the dispute and turns the goal of finding common right strictly into a defence of your position: “The interest in truth, which may be presumed to have been their only motive when they stated the proposition alleged to be true, now gives way to the interests of vanity: and so, for the sake of vanity, what is true must seem false, and what is false must seem true.”<sup>7</sup> Such communication activity is called Eristic Dialectic: “Controversial Dialectic is the art of disputing, and of disputing in such a way as to hold’s one own, whether one is in the right or the wrong – *per fas et nefas*.”<sup>8</sup>

It is worth noting here that the extent of dialectics does not exclude erist from using fair techniques to influence opinion when trying to indicate their reasons. It is also not true that Schopenhauer’s erist completely rejects the truth as a value. However, they relativize that value to justify their reason, which for the absolutist can be a preliminary manifestation of nihilism<sup>9</sup>; meanwhile, it is epistemological relativism. The proclaimed relativity of the truth has placed the eristic dialectics on the edge of not only ancient rhetoric but also philosophy. Meanwhile, as Krzysztof Szymanek indicates: “The persistent fight for one’s arguments does not have to arise from indifference, on the contrary, it can be understood as a result of respect for the truth, which has some rational foundations.”<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Art of Controversy*, ed. Axel Wendelberger, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders (Megaphone eBooks, 2008), 43.

<sup>7</sup> Schopenhauer, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>9</sup> Jan Hartman, “Nihilizm i Relatywizm Moralny,” *Principia* 59–60 (2014): 95–98, <https://doi.org/10.4467/20843887PI.14.004.2974>

<sup>10</sup> Krzysztof Szymanek, “Erystyka, moralność i wojna,” *Folia Philosophica* 45 (2021): 5.

## 2. The Erist and the Rhetor – a classic perspective

Erist's motivation is defending the truth to the extent in which they are convinced of the truthfulness of their theorem, while the choice of techniques to achieve this goal can allow him to commit wicked actions towards the recipient. The situation will be controversial only when erist is wrong, they know they are wrong but nevertheless continue to strive to win the dispute without changing the chosen means, defending a false thesis with those tricks. However, such sophisticated practice, although permissible in eristics, does not show the spectrum of erist's technical possibilities. If we consider defending lies as a main example of eristics, we will narrow its possibilities and it'll lead only to negative connotations.

The directive, which the rhetors follow, however, does not always have to lead to autotelic truth; the purpose of the argument can be more utilitarian. This is confirmed by Lichański in the article *Ethical Roots of Rhetoric*:

[...] In the history of rhetoric, in principle, we will not find deviations from the principles formulated by ancient theorists. However, as I mentioned, there was a small in these views. It was associated with what Johann Gerhard Vossius clearly described in the 17th century. Here is the rhetor to achieve 'victory in the dispute'. The desire for victory did not necessarily have to be associated with what we will describe as fair play or more correctly – the fully ethical behaviour of the speaker<sup>11</sup>.

Barbara Sobczak takes a different stance (in line with the Socratic-Platonic rhetoric), saying that the rhetor has to say what they consider to be true<sup>12</sup>. Sobczak significantly separates sophistics from noble rhetoric. She also sees the right goal of discussion in compromise and consensus which takes place in the rhetoric of

---

<sup>11</sup> Jakub Zdzisław Lichański, "Etyczne Korzenie Retoryki," in: *Retoryka i Etyka*, ed. Barbara Sobczak and Halina Zgólkowa (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2009), 13.

<sup>12</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Walter Rangeley Maitland Lamb, vol. 3, *Plato in Twelve Volumes* (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press; William Heinemann Ltd., 1967), 460e; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wiek Filozofii. Rozmowy z Riccardem Dottorim*, trans. Jadwiga Wilk (Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza Arboretum, 2009), 73–76, 92; quoted in: Barbara Sobczak, "Retoryka pojednania," in: *Cum reverentia, gratia, amicitia... Księga jubileuszowa dedykowana Profesorowi Bogdanowi Walczakowi*, ed. Jolanta Migdał and Agnieszka Piotrowska-Wojaczyk (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Rys, 2013), 284.

reconciliation<sup>13</sup>. In my opinion, the truth of the claims does not exclude that their truthfulness can be instrumentalized in favour of the benefit, which is still winning in the discussion. Both the rhetor and the erist shape the beliefs of the auditorium, while the purpose of their actions does not have to be (and in the case of erists, it is not) autotelic truth.

Lichański separates the classic rhetoric from its contemporary applications. However, he does not agree with the legitimacy of the distinction performed by the author of the *Critique of Judgment*<sup>14</sup> Kant recommends distinguishing noble rhetoric from oratory, which he sees in the use of persuasion and human weaknesses for one's own purposes. According to Kant, only substantive argument, free of persuasion, which is the weapon of orators, is enough to convince listeners:

However, the philosopher's [Kant's] reluctance to persuasion is more important; The belief that a fully factual argument is enough to convince an auditorium of his views is also striking. Unfortunately, the philosopher does not take into account that both the speaker and his listeners have to perceive issues related to social life in a similar way, and want to solve problems together, following the principles of ethics.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. The Erist and the Rhetor – a Modernized Perspective

Jens Leansky, in turn, points out that modern eristic is the art of defence against people violating the norms of discourse ethics<sup>16</sup>, and thus ethics striving for agreement. It indicates that with the help of eristics it is possible to maintain peaceful discussion principles, especially valuable in the era of post-truth:

Eristic is not an art of being right or winning an argument, but an art of protecting oneself from the one who deliberately violates norms of discourse ethics to gain argumentative acceptance. For this reason, eristic must be seen as a discipline of

---

<sup>13</sup> Sobczak, "Retoryka pojednania," 285.

<sup>14</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Pluhar Werner (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), § 53, 327–328; Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 5th ed., Der Philosophischen Bibliothek 39 (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1922), § 53, 216–217.

<sup>15</sup> Lichański, "Etyczne Korzenie Retoryki," 14.

<sup>16</sup> Mariola Flis, "Etyka personalistyczna i poczwórnny argument a etyka dyskursu," *Diame-tros* 2010, no. 24: 68, <https://doi.org/10.13153/diam.24.2010.394>

Enlightenment philosophy and a correlate of discourse ethics. Especially in the age of alternative facts and post-factual politics, this makes eristic a valuable discipline.<sup>17</sup>

The so-called post-truth has to do with facts and reliable arguments becoming less important in shaping social opinion than wielding an useful emotional influence, manipulating data, or referencing the beliefs of the auditorium. In the era of post-truth, the truth as a value loses its chief position in favour of the goal, which is profit in the form of, for example, increasing public support, even by using understatements, half-truths and even lies. Behind the dishonest actions of erist can not only stand a psychological need to be right but the need to defend a wider point, e.g. ideologies or political interests<sup>18</sup>. The manifestation of post-truth can not only be seen in politics, but also in dishonest marketing, which considers sales as the exclusive purpose of activity, and profit as a primary value, bending or breaking the principles and the main directives of the business ethics.

In the context of the indicated communication environment, eristic does not have to be treated as complicit in the continuation of the post-truth era. Any erist may strive for agreement, stepping beyond Schopenhauer's commonly accepted "art of winning disputes at all costs". Elżbieta Dutka indicates that eristics allow the usage of unethical ways of winning by any means necessary, which, however, does not mean that an erist must follow such a directive:

The difference between rhetoric and eristics is that the first wants to convince and the second wants to defeat the opponent. Eristics allow unethical ways of combating that lead to victory by any means necessary, by trick, disloyal grip, etc. Several dozen ways of verbal incapacitation of the opponent are given by Arthur Schopenhauer in eristics, i.e. the *The Art of Controversy*.<sup>19</sup>

Habermas' Consensus Theory of Truth assumes equal participation in the collective discourse and an agreement on what's true by exchanging arguments<sup>20</sup>.

---

<sup>17</sup> Jens Lemanski, "Discourse Ethics and Eristic," *Polish Journal of Aesthetics* 62 (2021): 151, <https://doi.org/10.19205/62.21.7>

<sup>18</sup> Szymonek, "Erystyka, moralność i wojna," 2.

<sup>19</sup> Elżbieta Dutka, "Kompozycja jako problem (nie tylko) retoryczny," in: *Retoryka*, by Maria Barłowska, Agnieszka Budzyńska-Daca, and Piotr Wilczek (Warszawa: PWN, 2015), 91.

<sup>20</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien," in: *Wirklichkeit Und Reflexionen: Walter Schulz Zum 60. Geburstata*, ed. Helmut Fahrenbach (Pfullingen: Neske-Bibliothek Pfullingen,

Kotarbiński also indicates the valuable use of dialectics and the possibility of a joint pursuit of objective truth, formulating the ideal of substantive discussion<sup>21</sup>. As long as we follow Habermas and his situation of perfect communication, such a concept theoretically does not have to oppose the absolutism of the truth. In the situation of a real exchange of sentences, such egalitarianism in the post-truth era is threatened with relativism. The threat is not in the assumption of the consensual theory of truth but in the intentions, interests and subjective goals of people taking part in the discussion.

A similar conclusion can be drawn by treating eristics as a neutral tool to conduct discussions, not burdened with pejorative connotations. The moral assessment of the use of eristics will depend on the intentions and goal of an erist, not the eristics themselves. Szymanek, for example, follows such a track, striving to cleanse the eristics of a number of negative meanings.

#### 4. Similarities

First and foremost, it should be stated that erist does not aim to present material objectively. Depending on the social function and held expectations in connection with the circumstances of the speech (e.g. a short interview on television), not only the selective presentation of the reason will be required but also pointing out the strongest arguments while bypassing the weakest to effectively influence the recipient. In the latter case, the recipient commits the so-called availability error, shaping their opinion in the belief that they have all of the necessary, relevant and exhaustive information, not knowing that some information was concealed from him. However, the rhetor can do the same thing by using the same techniques during their speech: emphasizing the role of the auditorium, ladling out praise, answering with a question to a question, etc. As Szymanek indicates:

---

1973), 219; quoted in: Andrzej Szahaj, "Interes — Poznanie — Dyskurs — Prawda. Jürgena Habermasa teoria poznania," *Studia Filozoficzne* 4 (1985): 156.

<sup>21</sup> Tadeusz Kotarbiński, "Logika Dla Prawników," in: *Ontologia, Teoria Poznania i Metodologia Nauk* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1993), 418; Szymanek, "Erystyka, moralność i wojna," 4.

Eristic discussion has a favourable distinction from rhetoric here because it has a built-in natural wall against selection of information: uncomfortable for a party data can always be immediately cited by the opposite side [...] We simply assume that it is not the speaker's task to present the material objectively, along with the reasons for and against it, but to persuade the voters to act a certain way. We care about effectiveness and we are far from caring that voters as a result of our actions will make a decision that abuses the principles of rationality. One can argue that the speaker allows themselves for tendentiousness because it is up to the other side of the dispute to fill in the missing data and refute the faulty arguments. However, one could answer that if we accept the fact that the presence of an opponent excuses the speaker from the duty of honesty, what do we actually have to accuse eristics of?<sup>22</sup>

Szymanek joins the critics of eristics because of their pursuit to defend their arguments at all costs, which does not allow to put the art of eristics on the same level as rhetoric in terms of moral assessment of the intentions of actions. However, he is surprised why the same label of dishonesty was not placed on rhetoric:

Unfortunately, all skills and capabilities can serve both good and evil. Pedagogical education makes it easier to kidnap children. A book in the field of criminology will teach a criminal how not to get caught. However, the fact that a given skill can be used for bad purposes, is not a sufficient reason to discontinue its development.<sup>23</sup>

The value of effectiveness and benefit for the erist remains superior to objective truth. However, the same accusation can also be made towards the rhetoric adept if they act in an unreliable way. By approaching the range of eristic techniques neutrally, they can be used for both good and bad purposes. As Szymanek writes:

Bringing erroneous arguments and data into the discussion [...] depends on the will of both the rhetor and the erist. There is no reason to believe that the nature of either of these arts is more likely to make the user use such methods or stop them from their use.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Szymanek, "Erystyka, moralność i wojna," 8.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 9.

My reflection comes down to a similar conclusion: negative value assigned to eristics, related to, among others, adopting a relativistic position, seems to have been moving eristics further away from rhetoric for centuries, while eristics themselves, as a range of techniques that can be used as tools *in potentia* for good as well as for bad purposes, the same way the rhetoric can. It is the intentions of the autonomously acting subject, endowed with knowledge and skills in the field of eristics that should be the subject of moral assessment and label of dishonesty in the event of acting no matter the costs. The use of eristic techniques in itself and the theoretical possibility of using them for manipulation purposes does not, in my opinion, meet the criteria to evaluate them solely negatively (unless, similarly, we will evaluate the rhetoric in the same negative way since they provide a range of equally dangerous techniques – of course *in potentia*). A similar view is presented by Miroslaw Korolko in *The Art of Rhetoric*.

Rhetoric [...], not being a purpose all on its own, but a tool, is a set of ethically neutral means. However, this is a set of particularly dangerous means if used for wicked purposes. [...] Rhetoric may therefore be used to humiliate or enslave the recipient. However, it should not be forgotten that it is not the rhetoric itself that humiliates or enslaves, but the man who is using it to persuade more efficiently.<sup>25</sup>

I agree with Szymanek's diagnosis that "it is not eristics that hurt, manipulate, mislead, but a man using it."<sup>26</sup> Even in the case of lies, there are circumstances that do not so much allow to morally excuse them but to evaluate them positively if the intention of a lying man is, for example, protecting someone's life, which in the event of revealing the truth would be threatened. This does not change the legitimacy of the general disapproval of lies. However, it allows for a different assessment in the case of intentionally misleading the interlocutor to achieve the purpose of unequivocally and undoubtedly valuable or for the unequivocally and undoubtedly positive virtue. Not wanting to bring considerations to the area of Machiavellianism, this last statement would require clarification for what values can be achieved at the expense of what other values, so for the so-called 'higher goal'.

<sup>25</sup> Miroslaw Korolko, *Sztuka Retoryki. Przewodnik Encyklopedyczny*, 2nd ed. (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1990), 40; quoted in: Szymanek, "Erystyka, moralność i wojna," 9.

<sup>26</sup> Szymanek, "Erystyka, moralność i wojna," 9–10.

A similar ambiguity in moral and axiological assessment can be seen in the case of manipulation. Due to many definitions (for example, the one formulated by Marek and Wojciech Warecki<sup>27</sup>), manipulation is always unambiguously pejorative. Each manipulator deserves a moral reprimand because they are not honest with the interlocutor and want to persuade them to act a certain way without them noticing. In my opinion, however, it is possible to use manipulation in a positive way, even as guidance for educational purposes. If we encourage someone who is barely determined to make a living, will we do it by saying: "In fact, your whole effort can go in vain"? Is one labelled with a negative name of a manipulator each time they conceal such a message for a more effective implicit persuasion? Here as well, the case is not morally unambiguous.

The upcoming question may be provocative: is it permissible to manipulate in the name of the truth? Szymanek finds an example of an eristic technique, according to which the sender encourages the interlocutor to consent to a deliberately forged thesis to demonstrate the incompatibility of their initial position with the opinion that they just adopted<sup>28</sup>. This is a classic example of *argumentum ad hominem* – the 16th eristic stratagems described by Schopenhauer<sup>29</sup>. Marek Kochan would describe it as 'nit-picking.'<sup>30</sup>

A negative assessment of the use of this technique will be more difficult when we are defending our right and a clearly logical error in the opponent's arguments occurs. The use of the *ad hominem* technique is to help with revealing the said error. Leading the interlocutor up the creek without a paddle like that, of course, has a destructive effect on their faulty view in their own eyes as well as in the eyes of the auditorium. Erist used a trick: they pretended that they agreed with the sentence, which they falsified after a while. If they acted on the account of defending their argument, and their reason is consistent with what can be considered to be true and justified, can the use of an eristic technique be considered permissible and justified? Can they defend themselves with words: "After all, everyone else does

---

<sup>27</sup> Wojciech Warecki and Marek Warecki, *Słowo o manipulacji czyli krótki podręcznik samoobrony* (Warszawa: Poltext, 2005), 11–12.

<sup>28</sup> Szymanek, "Erystyka, moralność i wojna," 12.

<sup>29</sup> Schopenhauer, *The Art of Controversy*, 22.

<sup>30</sup> Marek Kochan, *Pojedynek na słowa: techniki erystyczne w publicznych sporach* (Kraków: Znak, 2006), 72–82.

that", therefore with Cialdini's Social Proof<sup>31</sup>, justify the violation of the principle of fair play by the politician? Can referring to psychological and cultural conditions be superior to the moral directives functioning in analogous areas? These questions cannot be answered unambiguously, as when trying to answer them one has to take into account: situational context and, above all, the intention of the speaker.

Even if erist does not accept the truth in an objective sense, it does not deprive their statements of justification, and their reason does not have to be excluded by the subjective judgement criterion. The sentence can be objectively true even if its author does not accept the objectivity of the truth, but they have and can present a reasonable reason for the rightness of their view. Such a relativized truth can be rightly defended in the case of a justified view and defeating the opponent by pointing out their mistake.

## 5. Technical Evaluation

Although associated mainly with the use of unreliable arguments, "the art of being right" contains a set of unique ways of battling also with a dishonest opponent. The author is the one to decide which of the eristic techniques they will be using to defend their reason. It is worth noting that Tadeusz Kotarbiński does not assess eristics solemnly negatively, although he also describes it in military categories. He notices that eristic can be a form of "technical wisdom in conjunction with cleverness that causes the right disgust."<sup>32</sup> As long as the chief goal of an erist is victory in the discussion, military terminology seems appropriate, but the exact same goal may guide the rhetor during a public debate. Theoretically, they will differ because of the potential arsenal of techniques that are possible to use, but which they do not have to use if the opponent does not force them to do so. In practice, they have the same techniques at their disposal, although some of them – in the event of exposure – will weaken the positive image of the rhetor. It is not fitting for the rhetor to lie to others, which does not mean that if they lie without

---

<sup>31</sup> Robert Beno Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice*, 5th ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2009), 97–140.

<sup>32</sup> Kotarbiński, "Logika Dla Prawników," 418; quoted in: Szymanek, "Erystyka, moralność i wojna," 13.

it being noticed, they will lose their proud title in public opinion. Both the rhetor and the erist will not try to show recipients the entire technical repertoire of their argumentation unless it is to strengthen their own position or weaken the enemy's thesis. They can, however, organize their speech to make it seem more attractive and structurally stable – for the exact same purpose and by using the exact same knowledge of the art of speech (such as The Five Canons of Rhetoric in Ciceronian rhetoric).

As I pointed out, the use of both honest and dishonest techniques can be helpful, for example, in defending their own, justified beliefs against an unreliable opponent or when pointing out their errors in reasoning. Even if the erist corrects the opponent to defend his own position, such activity can be a form of educating an opponent or the auditorium. The selection of the most important arguments and focusing on them is not, after all, considered an unfair practice. Taking the same assumptions as the opponent and coming to different conclusions than him is also not immoral. What's more, as a method of pursuit of the (not necessarily objective) truth, it can be beneficial for both sides. Both Kotarbiński and Szymanek notice that technical usefulness of eristic dialectics<sup>33</sup>.

It is worth noting that Socrates has already used the Elenchus to pursue the truth through a fierce combat in the discussion. In the case of Socrates, however, one should talk about the pursuit of the objective truth<sup>34</sup>. Winning in the discussion was only a means to achieving the truth, not the other way around. The maieutic method does not deserve to be called manipulation because even if Socrates was helping the debater, whom he had just defeated, striving to bring his unconscious knowledge, he remained critical of his own reason and, together with the interlocutor, sought to extract and justify the truth.

---

<sup>33</sup> Kotarbiński, "Logika Dla Prawników," 418; Szymanek, "Erystyka, moralność i wojna," 3.

<sup>34</sup> Aleksandra Pelczar, "Wpływ Nauki Starożytnej Grecji Na Rozwój Logiki," *Ius et Administratio* 3, no. 48 (2022): 52, <https://doi.org/10.15584/iuseta.2022.3.5>

## 6. Conclusions

Knowledge of the wide repertoire of eristic techniques has been a tool for an experienced speaker for centuries. Even if the auditorium is exposed to unreliable techniques in the discussion, by observing the use of techniques, one can gain knowledge that will allow them to not give into the persuasive methods. Both the classic and the modern culture are imbued with the techniques of social influence that are implicit in public releases. Therefore, it seems reasonable even for people who do not specialize in the art of speech to become familiar with eristics and their persuasive influences. Participation in every discussion, not only in the public ones, requires knowledge of these techniques, if only in order not to use them by accident, but also so that if one decides to use them, they can do it responsibly. The repertoire of the erist and the rhetor in terms of verbal and non-verbal interactions can be metaphorically compared to a book on the shelf – an old book that is not very clean anymore, but due to its relevance, still eagerly read and indispensable on a shelf with instructional textbooks for contemporary marketing (especially political).

This article was devoted to the revision of the meanings and functionality of rhetoric and eristics, and its purpose was to attempt to justify and cleanse the eristics of their solemnly dishonourable meaning, which has been ascribed to them by historical and disciplinary (e.g. philosophers criticizing epistemological relativism) classifications. I have pointed out that the responsibility for the words used to influence the auditorium lies on the person who uses the verbal technique of social influence.

So called “eristic stratagems”<sup>35</sup> are a collection of techniques, which, although mostly used as an arsenal to dishonest winning of the dispute, can be an adequate weapon for the modern needs of public releases, which in some situations can be used in line with the truth and even for the truth (if we note beforehand that Erist does not acknowledge the objectivity of the truth)<sup>36</sup>. The issue of the technical and functional value of verbal techniques used in the discussion is perfectly summarized by the words of Jakub Lichański, based on Hans Blumenberg:

---

<sup>35</sup> Schopenhauer, *The Art of Controversy*, 12–40.

<sup>36</sup> Both the issue of the relationship between philosophy and eristics and of the ethical use of “eristic stratagems” are worthy of further and deeper considerations, which I plan to focus on in future publications.

First of all, rhetoric entrails the action and process of realizing the premises of this action and also refers to certain expectations (both of the speaker and their auditorium). Secondly, it is not ‘insidious’ because it reveals the ‘mechanism’ of creating argumentative text. Thirdly, it allows for a fuller analysis of the reasons for taking specific actions; Lastly, it makes us realize that we most often refer, in our linguistic activity, to beliefs, and ideas, but rarely – to facts (insofar as this word still means something for us). In other words: it is rhetoric that allows us to fully understand the strength of the conventions among which we live. To communicate, we must mainly get around the world of these conventions or expectations, or rather, metaphors, as Hans Blumenberg wants.<sup>37</sup>

In summary, eristic dialectics may (although do not have to) be a reasonable way to argue in accordance with directives that do not force to reject the truth as a subjective value. Nevertheless, erist does not have to act only in the service of subjective truth. They can indirectly defend objective truth as long as it collides with their beliefs, which are the proper subject of defence. Although their goal is not to defend the objectivity of the truth, it does not mean that they abandon this value with their actions. They avoid absolutism but from a technical perspective, such action does not have to exclude supporting axiological objectivity. It would be a benefit accompanying the resolution of the dispute in erist’s favor.

## Bibliography

Blumenberg, Hans. *Rzeczywistości, w Których Żyjemy. Rozprawy i Jedno Przemówienie*. Translated by Wanda Lipnik. Terminus. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 1997.

Cialdini, Robert Beno. *Influence: Science and Practice*. 5th ed. Boston: Pearson Education, 2009.

Dutka, Elżbieta. “Kompozycja jako problem (nie tylko) retoryczny.” In: *Retoryka*, by Maria Barłowska, Agnieszka Budzyńska-Daca, and Piotr Wilczek, 77–97. Warszawa: PWN, 2015.

Flis, Mariola. “Etyka personalistyczna i poczwórny argument a etyka dyskursu.” *Diametros* 2010, no. 24: 58–70. <https://doi.org/10.13153/diam.24.2010.394>

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Wiek Filozofii. Rozmowy z Riccardem Dottorim*. Translated by Jadwiga Wilk. Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza Arboretum, 2009.

---

<sup>37</sup> Hans Blumenberg, *Rzeczywistości, w Których Żyjemy. Rozprawy i Jedno Przemówienie*, trans. Wanda Lipnik, Terminus (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 1997), 105; 107; 112–13; 122; quoted in: Lichański, “Etyczne Korzenie Retoryki,” 18.

Habermas, Jürgen. "Wahrheitstheorien." In: *Wirklichkeit Und Reflexionen: Walter Schulz Zum 60. Geburstag*, edited by Helmut Fahrenbach, 211–266. Pfullingen: Neske-Bibliothek Pfullingen, 1973.

Hartman, Jan. "Nihilizm i Relatywizm Moralny." *Principia* 59–60 (2014): 83–100. <https://doi.org/10.4467/20843887PI.14.004.2974>

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Translated by Pluhar Werner. Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987.

Kant, Immanuel. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. 5th ed. Der Philosophischen Bibliothek 39. Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1922.

Kochan, Marek. *Pojedynek na słowa: techniki erystyczne w publicznych sporach*. Kraków: Znak, 2006.

Korolko, Mirosław. *Sztuka Retoryki. Przewodnik Encyklopedyczny*. 2nd ed. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1990.

Kotarbiński, Tadeusz. "Logika Dla Prawników." In: *Ontologia, Teoria Poznania i Metodologia Nauk*, 543. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1993.

Lemanski, Jens. "Discourse Ethics and Eristic," *Polish Journal of Aesthetics* 62 (2021): 151–162. <https://doi.org/10.19205/62.21.7>

Lichański, Jakub Zdzisław. "Etyczne Korzenie Retoryki." In: *Retoryka i Etyka*, edited by Barbara Sobczak and Halina Zgólkowa. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2009.

Lichański, Jakub Zdzisław. "Retoryka – wartości: sprzeczność, marzenie czy fakt?" In: *Retoryka i wartości*, edited by Agnieszka Budzyńska-Daca and Ewa Modrzejewska, 15–26. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2019.

Pelczar, Aleksandra. "Wpływ Nauki Starożytnej Grecji Na Rozwój Logiki." *Ius et Administratio* 3, no. 48 (2022): 47–56. <https://doi.org/10.15584/iuseta.2022.3.5>

Plato. *Gorgias*. Translated by Walter Rangeley Maitland Lamb. Vol. 3. 12 vols. Plato in Twelve Volumes. Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press; William Heinemann Ltd., 1967.

Plato. *Phaedrus*. Edited by John Burnet. Vol. 2. Platonis Opera. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903. <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0173%3Atext%3DPhaedrus%3Asection%3D262c> (accessed: 2.06.2024).

Plato. *Phaedrus*. Translated by Harold North Fowler. Vol. 9. Plato in Twelve Volumes. Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press; William Heinemann Ltd., 1925.

Quintilianus, Marcus Fabius. *Institutio Oratoria*. Translated by Harold Edgeworth Butler. Vol. 1. 4 vols. London; New York: William Heinemann; G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920.

Quintilianus, Marcus Fabius. "Institutio Oratoria." LacusCurtius, 8.03.2024. <http://www.the-latinlibrary.com/quintilian.html> (accessed: 2.06.2024).

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The Art of Controversy*. Edited by Axel Wendelberger. Translated by Thomas Bailey Saunders. Megaphone eBooks, 2008.

Sobczak, Barbara. "Retoryka pojednania." In: *Cum reverentia, gratia, amicitia... Księga jubileuszowa dedykowana Profesorowi Bogdanowi Walczakowi*, edited by Jolanta Migdał and Agnieszka Piotrowska-Wojaczyk, 275–285. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Rys, 2013.

Szahaj, Andrzej. "Interes — Poznanie — Dyskurs — Prawda. Jürgena Habermasa teoria poznania." *Studia Filozoficzne* 4 (1985): 138–159.

Szymanek, Krzysztof. "Erystyka, moralność i wojna." *Folia Philosophica* 45 (2021): 1–19.

Turabova, Sevara Kattakulovna. "Conceptual and Methodological Approach in the Study of the Logical and Gnoseological Status of the Phenomenon of a Scientific Dispute." *Procedia of Philosophical and Pedagogical Sciences* 2, no. 8 (2023): 48–54.

Warecki, Wojciech, and Marek Warecki. *Słowo o manipulacji czyli krótki podręcznik samoobrony*. Warszawa: Poltext, 2005.

## Streszczenie

### O zasadności erystyki w kontekście retoryki

Artykuł stanowi próbę współczesnego zrewidowania erystyki w perspektywie formułowanego wobec niej powszechnie (już od czasów starożytnych) zarzutu o bycie niemoralną sztuką wykrętów, udającą jedynie retorykę – szlachetną sztukę dążenia do prawdy. Realizacja tego celu wymaga dokonania oceny relacji między retoryką a erystyką, szczególnie pod względem podobieństw. Już bowiem Arystotelesowska charakterystyka erystyki oddzielała je od siebie, wskazując przy tym na nieuczciwość stosujących erystykę. Artur Schopenhauer dokonuje z kolei diagnozy „niezgody”, wskazując na wrodzoną ludziom skłonność do zwycięzania bez względu na środki. Krzysztof Szymanek dąży z kolei do usprawiedliwienia i niejako „oczyszczania” erystyki z części pejoratywnych etykietek, ukazując przede wszystkim jej techniczny wymiar, częściowo łączący ją z retoryką pod względem niejawnego wywierania wpływu. Edukacyjna funkcja erystyki, choć nie stanowi jej naczelnego celu, pozwala na jej ocenę jako elementu sztuki argumentacji, aniżeli wyłącznie jako zbioru technik niegodnych poważanego mówcy.

Słowa kluczowe: erystyka, retoryka, erysta, retor, chwyt

## Zusammenfassung

### Über die Berechtigung der Eristik im Kontext der Rhetorik

Dieser Artikel ist der Versuch einer zeitgemäßen Revision der Eristik im Lichte des (seit der Antike) gegen sie erhobenen Vorwurfs, sie sei eine unmoralische Kunst der Ausflüchte, die nur vorgibt, Rhetorik zu sein – die edle Kunst der Wahrheitsfindung. Die Verfolgung dieses Ziels erfordert eine Bewertung des Verhältnisses zwischen Rhetorik und Eristik, insbesondere im Hinblick auf die Gemeinsamkeiten. Denn schon Aristoteles hat in seiner Charakterisierung der Eristik die beiden getrennt und gleichzeitig auf die Unehrlichkeit derjenigen hingewiesen, die sich der Eristik bedienen. Arthur Schopenhauer hingegen diagnostiziert die „Zwietracht“

und verweist auf die angeborene menschliche Tendenz, ohne Rücksicht auf die Mittel zu gewinnen. Krzysztof Szymanek hingegen versucht, die eristischen Techniken zu rechtfertigen und gleichsam von einigen pejorativen Etiketten zu „reinigen“, indem er vor allem ihre technische Dimension aufzeigt und sie teilweise mit der Rhetorik im Sinne einer verdeckten Einflussnahme in Verbindung bringt. Die erzieherische Funktion der Eristik, auch wenn sie nicht ihr Hauptziel ist, erlaubt es, sie als ein Element der Argumentationskunst zu bewerten und nicht nur als eine Reihe von Techniken, die eines ehrbaren Redners unwürdig sind.

Schlüsselworte: Eristik, Rhetorik, Eristiker, Rhetor, Griff

*Ins Deutsche übersetzt von Anna Pastuszka*

Informacja o Autorze:

KRZYSZTOF ROJEK, dr, Instytut Filozofii, Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie; adres do korespondencji: Instytut Filozofii UMCS, Pl. Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej 4, 20-031 Lublin; e-mail: krzysztof.rojek@mail.umcs.pl

