



The Art of Being Right

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

Plain English Translation

MOUSEIA



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TRANSLATOR

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GAPS AND UNCERTAINTIES

The manuscript is unfinished; this is its complete text in the 1923 edition. The final unnumbered stratagem is labeled 38. Source critical brackets and notes are retained; “our edition” inside notes refers to Deussen's edition. The printed incomplete Horace citation is retained without an invented completion.

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Logic and dialectic

The ancients already treated *logic* and *dialectic* as words for the same thing. Yet *logizesthai* means thinking something over, considering it or calculating, while *dialegesthai* means talking with someone. These are very different activities. According to Diogenes Laertius, *Plato* first used the name *dialectic*: dialectic, the study of dialectic, and a dialectician. In the *Phaedrus*, *Sophist*, *Republic* lib. 7 and elsewhere, he means reasoning according to rules and being skilled at it. *Aristotle* uses “dialectical matters” with the same meaning. But Laurentius Valla says Aristotle was the first to use “logic” this way. We find in his works “logical difficulties,” meaning subtleties, “a logical proposition,” and “a logical puzzle.” So the name “dialectic” would be older than “logic.” Cicero and Quintilian use *Dialectica* and *Logica* with the same broad meaning. Cic. in *Lucullo*: “Dialectic was invented as a kind of judge between true and false.” And: “The Stoics carefully investigated ways of judging in the science they call dialectic.” Cic. *Topica*, c. 2. *Quinct.* lib. [XII,2]: “So this part of dialectic, or debating, if we prefer to call it that.” He seems to take the latter word as the Latin equivalent of dialectic. So far, this follows *Petri Rami dialectica*, Audomari Talaui *praelectionibus illustrata*. 1569. People continued using logic and dialectic as synonyms in the Middle Ages and in modern times, right up to today. In more recent times, though, particularly in Kant, “dialectic” has often had a bad meaning: the sophistical art of debating. People have therefore preferred the less objectionable name “logic.” Originally, however, the two mean the same thing. In the last few years people have again treated them as synonyms.

It is unfortunate that “logic” and “dialectic” have been treated as synonyms for so long. It stops me from separating their meanings as freely as I would like. I would *define* “*logic*” as “the science of the laws of thinking, or the way *reason* works.” Its name comes from *logizesthai*, to think over or calculate, and from *logos*, word and reason, which cannot be separated. I would define “*dialectic*” as “the art of debating,” in the modern meaning of that word. It comes from

dialegesthai, to converse. A conversation communicates either facts or opinions, so it is either historical or concerned with deliberation. Logic would clearly have a subject we could determine entirely a priori, without mixing in experience. That subject is the laws of thinking: the way reason, logos, proceeds when left alone and undisturbed. It concerns a rational being thinking alone, with nothing to mislead it. *Dialectic* would instead concern two rational beings thinking together. As soon as they fail to agree like two clocks keeping time together, their thinking becomes a dispute, a mental contest. As *pure reason*, both people would have to agree. Their disagreements come from the differences that belong to individuality. These are therefore *a matter of experience*. Logic, the science of thinking and of how pure reason proceeds, could thus be developed entirely a priori. Dialectic could be developed mostly only a posteriori: from experience of how differences between individuals disturb pure thinking when two rational beings think together, and of the methods each uses against the other to get their own thinking accepted as pure and objective. Human nature works like this: when A and B think together and exchange opinions—leaving aside conversations about historical facts—and A finds that B thinks differently about the same subject, A does not first examine their own thinking for a mistake. A assumes the mistake is in B’s thinking. In other words, people are naturally *determined to be right*. The discipline that teaches the procedures arising from this trait is what I would like to call dialectic. To prevent misunderstanding, I will call it “*eristic dialectic*.” It would study the methods people use in their natural determination to be right.

Introduction

*Eristic dialectic*¹ is the art of arguing, specifically of arguing so that you *come out right*, whether *by fair means or foul*.² You can be objectively right about the matter itself and still end up wrong in the eyes of the onlookers, sometimes even in your own. This happens when an opponent refutes my proof and this is taken as a refutation of the claim itself, although there may be other proofs

for it. In that case, of course, the opponent's position is the reverse: he comes out right while being objectively wrong. So the objective truth of a proposition is one thing; its acceptance by the people arguing and listening is another. (Dialectic is concerned with the latter.)

Why does this happen?—Because of the natural badness of the human race. If this did not exist, if we were honest through and through, our only aim in any debate would be to bring the truth to light. We would not care at all whether it agreed with the opinion we first put forward or with the other person's.³ That would not matter, or at least it would be entirely secondary. As things stand, it is the main thing. Our inborn vanity, which is especially sensitive about our intellectual abilities, will not accept that what we first claimed should turn out false and our opponent's claim right. To avoid this, each person would only need to make sure that his judgments were correct. For that, he would have to think first and speak afterward. But in most people, inborn vanity comes with a love of talking and inborn *dishonesty*. They speak before they think. Even if they realize afterward that their claim is false and they are wrong, it must still look as though the opposite were true. Concern for truth, which was probably their only motive in most cases when they put forward the proposition they believed to be true, now gives way entirely to concern for their vanity: truth must look false, and falsehood true.

Yet even this dishonesty—sticking to a proposition that already seems false to us—has an excuse. We are often firmly convinced at first that our claim is true, but now our opponent's argument seems to overturn it. If we give up on it at once, we often discover afterward that we were right after all. Our proof was wrong, but there could have been a sound proof for the claim: the argument that would have saved it simply did not occur to us at once. This leads us to adopt a rule: even when the counterargument seems sound and conclusive, keep fighting it, in the belief that its soundness is itself only apparent, and that during the argument we will still think of an argument to overturn it, or one that confirms our truth in some other way. This almost forces us into dishonesty in argument, or at least makes it easy to fall into it. In this way, the weakness of our understanding and the perversity of our will support each other. As

a result, people who argue generally fight not for truth but for their own proposition, as if defending their hearth and home. They use fair means or foul; indeed, as we have seen, they can hardly do otherwise. So, as a rule, everyone will want to get his claim accepted, even if for the moment it seems false or doubtful to him.⁴ Each person's own cunning and badness give him some of the means to do this, as everyday experience of arguments teaches us. Everyone therefore has his own *natural dialectic*, just as he has his own *natural logic*. But the former guides him far less reliably than the latter. Hardly anyone will think or draw conclusions contrary to the laws of logic: false judgments are common, but faulty inferences are extremely rare. So people rarely show a lack of natural logic, but they certainly do show a lack of natural dialectic. It is an unevenly distributed natural gift, like the power of judgment, which is distributed very unevenly, whereas reason itself is really distributed equally. People are often confused and refuted by arguments that only seem valid when they are actually right, or the reverse happens. Someone who comes out of an argument the winner very often owes this less to the correctness of his judgment in putting forward his proposition than to the cunning and skill with which he defended it. Here, as everywhere, natural talent is best.⁵ Still, practice, and also reflection on the moves we use to bring an opponent down or that he generally uses to bring us down, can do a great deal to make us masters of this art.

So even if logic can have no real practical use, dialectic certainly can. It also seems to me that Aristotle developed his logic proper (analytics) chiefly as a foundation and preparation for *dialectic*, and that dialectic was his main concern. Logic deals only with the form of propositions; dialectic deals with their substance or subject matter, their content. For that very reason, the study of *form*, as the general element, had to come before the study of content, as the particular element.

Aristotle does not define the aim of dialectic as sharply as I have. He does name arguing as its main aim, but also discovering the truth.⁶ Later, however, he says that we treat propositions philosophically in terms of truth, and dialectically in terms of appearance or approval, other people's judgment (opinion), *Top. I*, 12. He is aware of the distinction and separation between the objective truth of

a proposition and getting it accepted or winning approval for it. But he does not keep them sharply enough apart to assign only the latter to dialectic.⁷ As a result, his rules for the latter purpose are often mixed with rules for the former. That is why it seems to me that he has not carried out his task cleanly.⁸

¹ [Addition before this:] The ancients generally use logic and dialectic as synonyms. Modern writers do too. [This follows, crossed out in ink:] But I say

² Eristic would only be a harsher word for the same thing. Aristotle (according to Diog. Laert. V, 28) grouped rhetoric and dialectic together, their aim being persuasion, what is persuasive; then analytics and philosophy, whose aim is truth. —“Dialectic is the art of argument by which we refute or establish something through questions and answers exchanged by those in conversation.” Diog. Laert. III, 48 in vita Platonis.

Aristotle does distinguish 1) logic or analytics, as the theory of, or instruction in, true inferences, those that demonstrate their conclusions; 2) dialectic, or instruction in inferences that are accepted as true, that pass as true—accepted opinions, probable propositions (Top. I. c. 1 [et] 12). Here it is not established that they are false, but neither is it established that they are true (in themselves), since that is not what matters. But what is this other than the art of coming out right, whether or not you are actually right? It is the art of gaining the appearance of truth without caring about the facts. Hence what was said at the beginning. Aristotle actually divides inferences into logical and dialectical, as just described; then 3) *eristic* inferences (eristic), in which the form of the inference is correct, but the propositions themselves, the subject matter, are not true and only seem true; and finally 4) *sophistical* inferences (sophistry), in which the form of the inference is faulty but seems correct. All three of the last kinds really belong to *eristic dialectic*, since all aim not at objective truth but at its appearance, without caring about truth itself: in other words, at *coming out right*. The book on sophistical inferences was only published separately later; it was the last book of the Dialectic.

³ [Note below this:] (See Buhle’s Latin introductions to Topica and Elenchi.)

⁴ [Note beside this:] *Machiavelli* instructs the prince to use every moment of weakness in his neighbor to attack him, because otherwise the neighbor may one day take advantage of a moment when the prince is weak. If loyalty and honesty prevailed, it would be different. But since we cannot expect them, we must not practice them, because they are poorly rewarded. It is the same in argument: if I concede that my opponent is right as soon as he seems to be, he will hardly do the same when the situation is reversed. Instead, he will use unfair means, so I must too. It is easy to say that we should pursue only the truth, without favoring our own proposition. But we cannot assume that the other person will do this, so we must not do it either. Besides, if I were to abandon my proposition, which I had already thought through, as soon as it seemed to me that he was right, I could easily be misled by a momentary impression into giving up the truth and accepting error.

⁵ [Beside this in the margin:] But teaching develops inborn strength. [Hor.]

⁶ [Beside this in the margin:] Top. I, 2.

⁷ [On this in the margin:] On the other hand, in the book *de elenchis sophisticis*, he again makes too much effort to separate dialectic from sophistry and eristic. The supposed distinction is that dialectical inferences are true in form and content, while eristic or sophistical inferences are false. These last two differ only in their purpose: in the former (eristic), the aim is being right for its own sake; in the latter (sophistry), it is the reputation gained by being right and the money to be made from that reputation. Whether propositions are true in content is always far too uncertain to serve as the basis for a distinction. The person arguing is least of all in a position to be completely certain about it. Even the result of the argument gives only an uncertain indication. So we must include sophistry, eristic, and examination through argument within Aristotle's dialectic and define it as the art of coming out right in an argument. Of course, the greatest help in this is to be right about the matter in the first place. But given people's way of thinking, that alone is not enough; and given the weakness of their understanding, it is not absolutely necessary either. Other tricks are

needed as well. Precisely because they do not depend on being objectively right, they can also be used when we are objectively wrong—and we hardly ever know for certain whether that is the case. My view, then, is to separate *dialectic* from *logic* more sharply than Aristotle did: to leave objective truth, insofar as it concerns form, to *logic*, and to limit dialectic to *coming out right*. But I would not separate sophistry and eristic from it as Aristotle does, since that distinction rests on the objective truth of the subject matter, which we cannot clearly and confidently determine in advance. Instead, we must say with Pontius Pilate, “What is truth?”—For truth is in a well; truth is in the depths: a saying of Democritus, Diog. Laert. IX, 72. It is easy to say that in an argument we should aim at nothing but bringing truth to light. But we do not yet know where it is; our opponent’s arguments and our own lead us astray.—Still, once the matter is understood, let us be flexible about words: since people generally use the name *dialectic* as a synonym for *logic*, let us call our discipline *Dialectica eristica*, *eristic dialectic*.—

- ⁸ [Addition beside this:] (We must always keep the subject matter of one discipline clearly separate from that of every other.)

Aristotle’s Topics

In the *Topics*, Aristotle set about developing dialectic with his own scientific approach, working very methodically and systematically. This deserves admiration, even though he did not do much to achieve the aim, which here is clearly practical. In the *Analytics*, he had considered concepts, judgments, and inferences purely in terms of their *form*. Now he turns to their *content*. Here he is really concerned only with concepts, since they contain the substance. Propositions and inferences, taken by themselves, are mere form: concepts are their substance.¹—His procedure is as follows. Every debate has a thesis or problem—these differ only in form—and then propositions intended to resolve it. What is at issue is always the relationship between concepts. To begin

with, there are four such relationships. For a given concept, we look for either 1) its definition, 2) its genus, 3) its distinctive, essential feature, its proprium or distinctive property, or 4) its accident, meaning any property at all, whether distinctive and exclusive or not—in short, a predicate. The problem in every debate can be reduced to one of these relationships. This is the basis of the whole of dialectic. In its 8 books, he sets out all the relationships concepts can have to one another in these four respects, and gives rules for every possible relationship. He explains how one concept must relate to another to be its distinctive property, its accident, its genus, the thing it defines, or its definition; what mistakes are easily made in establishing these relationships; and, in each case, what we must therefore watch for when establishing such a relationship ourselves, and what we can do to overturn it once someone else has established it. He calls the statement of each such rule, or each such general relationship between these classes of concepts, a topic or locus, and gives 382 such topics: hence the title *Topics*. He adds a few general rules about debate as a whole, but these are far from exhaustive. A topic, then, is not purely a matter of content: it does not refer to a particular object or concept. Instead, it always concerns a relationship between whole classes of concepts. Countless concepts can share this relationship as soon as they are considered in relation to one another in one of the four respects mentioned, as happens in every debate. These four respects also have subordinate classes. So the discussion here is still formal to a certain extent, though not as purely formal as in logic. It deals with the content of *concepts*, but in a formal way: it states how the content of concept A must relate to that of concept B for B to be presented as A's genus, distinctive property or feature, accident, or definition. It also considers the headings subordinate to these: opposites, cause and effect, possession of a property and its absence, and so on. Every debate is supposed to turn on a relationship of this kind. Most of the rules he gives as topics concerning these relationships are inherent in the nature of conceptual relationships. Everyone is already aware of them and naturally insists that an opponent follow them, just as in logic. It is easier to follow them in a particular case, or notice when they are neglected, than to remember the abstract topic governing them. This is precisely why this dialectic has little prac-

tical use. He says almost nothing but things that are obvious, things that sound judgment naturally takes into account. Examples: “If a thing is said to belong to a *genus*, it must also belong to some *species* of that genus. If it does not, the claim is false. For example, suppose someone claims that the soul has *motion*. Then some particular kind of motion must belong to it: flying, walking, growth, decrease, and so on. If none does, it has no motion either. So whatever belongs to no species does not belong to the genus either: that is the topic.” This topic can be used both to establish a claim and to overturn one. It is the 9th topic. Conversely, whatever does not belong to the genus does not belong to any of its species either. For example, someone is alleged to have spoken badly of another person. If we prove that he did not speak at all, he cannot have done that either: where the genus is absent, the species cannot be present.

Under the heading of the *distinctive property, or proprium*, the 215th locus runs as follows: “First, for overturning a claim: if your opponent presents something that can only be perceived through the senses as a distinctive property, he has chosen badly. Anything perceived through the senses becomes uncertain as soon as it passes beyond their range. For example, he gives as the distinctive property of the *sun* that it is the brightest heavenly body to travel above the earth. This will not do: once the sun has set, we do not know whether it travels above the earth, because it is then beyond the range of our senses. Second, for establishing a claim: a distinctive property is correctly given if the property proposed is not known through the senses, or, if it is, is nevertheless necessarily present. For example, suppose it is given as the distinctive property of a *surface* that it is the first thing to receive color. This is indeed a sensory feature, but one that is obviously always present, so it is correct.”—That is enough to give you an idea of Aristotle’s dialectic. It seems to me not to achieve its aim, so I have tried a different approach. Cicero’s *Topica* is an imitation of Aristotle’s work, written from memory: extremely shallow and poor. Cicero has no clear idea at all of what a topic is or what it is meant to do. So he rambles on with all kinds of things off the top of his head and fills them out with plenty of legal examples. It is one of his worst works.

¹ [Added in the margin:] Concepts can, however, be placed under certain classes, such as genus and species, cause and effect, a property and its opposite, possession and absence, and others of that kind. Certain general rules apply to these classes: these are the *loci*, or topics. For example, a topic of cause and effect is: “The cause of a cause is a cause of the effect.” Applied to a case: “The cause of my happiness is my wealth, so the person who gave me my wealth is also responsible for my happiness.” Topics concerning opposites: 1) They exclude each other, for example straight and curved. 2) They are in the same subject: for example, if love has its seat in the will, the desiring part, hatred does too. But if hatred is seated in feeling, the spirited part, so is love. If the soul cannot be white, it cannot be black either. 3) If the lower degree is absent, the higher degree is absent too: if a person is not just, he is not benevolent either. You can see from this that topics are certain general truths applying to whole classes of concepts. We can therefore turn back to them when particular cases arise, drawing our arguments from them and also appealing to them as generally obvious truths. Yet most are highly misleading and subject to many exceptions. For example, one topic is: opposite things have opposite relationships. For example, virtue is beautiful and vice is ugly. Friendship is benevolent; enmity is malevolent. But now try this: wastefulness is a vice, so stinginess is a virtue; fools tell the truth, so wise people lie. It does not work. Death is passing away, so life is coming into being: false.

[Addition:] An example of how misleading such topics are: in *de praedestinatione* cap. 3, Scotus Erigena wants to refute the heretics who assumed [two] predestinations in God—one predestining the chosen to salvation, the other predestining the rejected to damnation. To do so, he uses this topic, taken from God knows where: “All things that are contrary to one another must have causes that are contrary to one another; for *reason rules out* one and the same cause producing different, mutually contrary things.” Really! But *experience teaches* that the same heat hardens clay and softens wax, and a hundred similar things. Yet the topic sounds plausible. He calmly builds his demonstration on the topic [Sch.: from], however; the demonstration is of no further concern to us.—

Bacon of Verulam put together a whole collection of topics and their refutations under the title *Colores boni et mali*. They can be used as examples here. He calls them *Sophismata*.

[Addition, apparently entered earlier than the preceding addition, judging by the way it was written:] Another argument that can be considered a topic is the one Socrates uses in the Symposium against Agathon. Agathon had credited *love* with every excellent quality—beauty, goodness, and so on—and Socrates proves the opposite: “Whatever someone seeks, he does not have. Now love seeks beauty and goodness, so it does not have them.”

[Addition:] There is something plausible about the idea that certain universally valid truths might apply to everything, allowing us to decide all the particular cases that arise, however different they may be, without looking more closely at their specific features. (The law of compensation is quite a good topic.) But it does not work, precisely because concepts arise by abstracting from differences and therefore cover the most diverse things. This diversity shows itself again when concepts are used to bring individual things of very different kinds together, and a decision is made solely on the basis of the higher concepts. It is even natural for someone under pressure in a debate to take refuge behind some general topic. The law of economy in nature is also a topic, as is: nature does nothing in vain.—[Later addition:] In fact, all proverbs are topics with a practical aim.

The task of dialectic

To define *dialectic* on its own, we must set aside objective truth, which belongs to logic. We must treat it simply as *the art of winning the argument*. Naturally, this is easier when one is actually right. Dialectic itself, though, must only teach us how to defend ourselves against every sort of attack, especially dishonest attacks. It must also teach us how to attack another person’s claims without contradicting ourselves or being refuted. Finding objective truth is quite separate from getting our statements accepted as true. The first belongs to a differ-

ent inquiry. It depends on judgment, thought and experience, and has no special art of its own. The second is dialectic's purpose. People have defined dialectic as the logic of appearances. That is wrong: it would make it useful only for defending false statements. Even when we are right, we need dialectic to defend our position. We must know dishonest tricks so we can counter them. Often we even need to use some ourselves to defeat the opponent with the same weapons. So dialectic must put objective truth aside or treat it as something incidental. It must look only at how we defend our claims and overthrow someone else's. Rules for doing this must not depend on *objective truth*, since usually we do not know which side has it.¹ We often do not know whether we are right. We often think we are and are mistaken. Both sides often think they are right. For truth lies in a well—truth is in the depths, as Democritus says. When a dispute begins, each person usually thinks truth is on their side. As it continues, both become uncertain. The end is supposed to establish and confirm the truth. Dialectic must stay out of that, just as a fencing teacher ignores who was right in the quarrel that caused the duel. What matters is hitting and blocking. Dialectic is fencing with the mind. Only if we understand it this way can we make it a separate discipline. If we aim at pure objective truth, we return to *logic* alone. If we aim to establish false statements, we have only *sophistry*. Both aims assume that we already know what is objectively true or false. We seldom know this for certain beforehand. The correct definition of dialectic is therefore the one given here: mental fencing to win arguments. “Eristic” would be a better name, and “eristic dialectic,” *Dialectica eristica*, probably the most accurate. It is very useful and has been wrongly neglected in recent times. Dialectic in this sense should collect and explain, in a system of rules, the techniques people naturally use when they see that truth is not on their side but still want to win. It would therefore defeat the purpose to make the systematic study of dialectic concern itself with objective truth and how to discover it. Natural, original dialectic does not do this. It aims only to be right. The main task of dialectic as we understand it is thus *to identify and analyze dishonest*

debating tricks. We can then immediately recognize and defeat them in actual debates. For that very reason, its account must openly take winning the argument, rather than objective truth, as its final aim.

Despite looking far and wide, I know of no work that has achieved this.² The field is still uncultivated. To achieve the aim, we would have to learn from experience. We would watch the debates that often arise in conversation and notice which tricks each side uses. We would then identify the general patterns in tricks that recur in different forms. From these we would establish general strategies, useful both for our own use and for defeating them when someone else uses them.

Treat what follows as a *first attempt*.

- ¹ [In the margin beside this:] Truth lies in a well, truth is in the depths, a saying of Democritus. Diog. Laert. IX, 72. Two people often argue very energetically, then each goes home holding the other's opinion. They have swapped.
- ² [Added in the margin:] Diogenes Laertius says that among Theophrastus's many writings on rhetoric, all now lost, one was called A Contest in the Theory of Eristic Arguments. That would be our subject.

Basis of all dialectic

First consider *what is essential to every dispute*: what actually takes place.

The opponent has put forward a claim. Or we have; that makes no difference. We have two modes and two methods of refuting it.

1) *The modes*: a) *ad rem*; b) *ad hominem*, also called *ex concessis*. We show either that the claim conflicts with the nature of things, with absolute objective truth, or that it conflicts with something else the opponent has claimed or accepted, with relative subjective truth. The second only disproves the claim relative to that person's position. It settles nothing about objective truth.

2) *The methods*: a) direct refutation; b) indirect refutation. The direct method attacks the reasons supporting the claim. The indirect method attacks what follows from it. The direct method shows that the claim is not true. The indirect method shows that it cannot be true.

1) With the *direct* method we can do either of two things. We can show that the reasons for the opponent's claim are false: "I deny the major premise; the minor premise." Or we can accept the reasons but show that the claim does not follow: "I deny the inference." In that case we attack the *connection*, the form of the reasoning.

2) With *indirect* refutation we use either *apagoge* or a *counterexample*.

a) *Apagoge*: we assume the claim is true. We then use it as a premise together with another statement accepted as true, and show what follows. Suppose the result is clearly false because it conflicts with the nature of things¹ or with the opponent's other claims. It is then false *ad rem* or *ad hominem*. (Socrates in *Hippia maj. et alias*.) The original claim was therefore false too. Only true statements can follow from true premises, although false premises do not always produce false statements.

b) *A counterexample*, *enstasis*, *exemplum in contrarium*: we directly identify particular cases covered by a general statement, but to which it does not apply. This refutes the general statement, which must itself be false.

This is the framework, the skeleton, of every dispute. We have studied its bones. All debating comes down to this, but it can happen genuinely or only apparently, with sound reasons or unsound ones. Since it is hard to be certain which is happening, debates are long and stubborn. In teaching this, we cannot separate the genuine from the apparent either. The people arguing are never certain of this in advance. So I give the *tricks* without considering whether we are objectively right or wrong. We cannot know that for certain ourselves; the dispute is meant to decide it. Besides, any debate or argument requires agreement on something to use as a principle for judging the question. You cannot argue with someone who denies the principles.

- ¹ [Addition to the addition:] If the conclusion directly contradicts a completely certain truth, we have shown the opponent's position to be absurd.

Stratagem 1

Extension. Push the opponent's statement past its natural limits. Give it the broadest meaning you can and exaggerate it. Keep your own statement within the narrowest possible meaning and limits. The broader a statement is, the more ways there are to attack it. The defense is to state exactly what point or issue is being disputed.

Example 1. I said, "The English are the best nation at drama." The opponent tried to give a counterexample. He replied that everyone knew they could achieve nothing in music, and therefore in opera. I stopped him by pointing out that music was not included in *drama*: that meant only tragedy and comedy. He knew that perfectly well. He was trying to widen my claim to include all theatrical performances, then opera, then music, so he could be sure of defeating me.

You can also save your own claim by narrowing it beyond what you originally intended, if the words you used allow this.

Example 2. A says, "The peace of 1814 even gave all the German Hanseatic cities their independence back." B gives Danzig as a counterexample: it lost the independence Bonaparte had granted it through that peace. A saves the claim by saying, "I said all the German Hanseatic cities. Danzig was a Polish Hanseatic city."

Aristotle already teaches this trick. *Topica Lib. VIII, c.12,11.*

Example 3. Lamarck, *Philosophie zoologique* Vol. 1, p 203, denies that polyps have any sensation because they have no nerves. But they certainly *perceive*. They follow the light, moving skillfully from branch to branch, and they catch their prey. People have therefore assumed that their nervous matter is spread evenly throughout the whole body, almost dissolved into it. They clearly perceive things without separate sense organs. This overturns Lamarck's assump-

tion, so he argues this way: “Then every part of a polyp’s body would have to be able to have every kind of sensation, and also movement, will and *thought*. Every point of its body would then have all the organs of the most highly developed animal. Each point could see, smell, taste, hear, and so on, and even think, judge and draw conclusions. Each particle of its body would be a complete animal. The polyp itself would be above a human being, since every small part of it would have all the abilities that a human has only as a whole. There would also be no reason not to extend the claim from polyps to the *monad*, the least developed of all beings, and finally to plants too, since they also live, and so on.” A writer who uses debating tricks like these shows that they secretly know they are wrong. The statement was that the whole body senses light and is therefore like nervous tissue. He turns that into a claim that the whole body thinks.

Stratagem 2

Use *different meanings of the same word* to extend a claim to something that shares little or nothing with the subject except that word. Clearly refute this new claim, then make it look as if you have refuted the original.

Remark. Synonyms are two words for one concept. Homonyms are two concepts expressed by one word. See Aristot. Topica Lib. I. cap. 13. “Deep,” “cutting” and “high,” used sometimes about bodies and sometimes about sounds, are *homonyms*. “Honest” and “trustworthy” are *synonyms*.

This trick can be treated as the fallacy based on homonyms. But an obvious example of that fallacy will not really deceive anyone.

Any light can be put out.

The intellect is a light.

The intellect can be put out.

We immediately see that this uses four terms: “light” in its literal meaning and “light” in its figurative meaning. Subtle cases can certainly deceive people, though, especially when the concepts expressed by the same word are related and overlap.

Example 1.¹ A: “You have not yet been introduced to the mysteries of Kant’s philosophy.”

B: “Well, I want nothing to do with mysteries.”

[Example 2.] I criticized a principle of honor as unreasonable. According to it, an insult dishonors the person insulted unless they answer with a worse insult or wash it away with blood, either the opponent’s or their own. My reason was that true honor can be harmed only by what we do, not by what we suffer. Anything can happen to anyone. The opponent attacked that reason directly. He clearly showed that falsely accusing a merchant of fraud, dishonesty or negligence in their trade attacks their honor. In this case their honor is harmed entirely through something they suffer. They can restore it only by getting the attacker punished and making them withdraw the accusation.

By using the two meanings of “honor,” he slipped *civil honor*, usually called a *good reputation*, which is harmed by *slander*, into *the idea of a duelist’s honor*, also called *point d’honneur*, which is harmed by *insults*. An attack on the first cannot be ignored: it must be answered with a public refutation. So, he argued, an attack on the second must also be answered, with a worse insult and a duel. He mixed up two essentially different things by using the two meanings of the word “*honor*”. This changed the issue being argued about.

¹ [Beside this in the margin:] Invented cases are never subtle enough to deceive. We must collect cases from our own actual experience. It would be very useful to give each trick a short name that accurately describes it. Then, whenever someone used it, we could immediately accuse them of using that particular trick.

Stratagem 3

Take a claim¹ that was made only in a particular respect as if it were general, unqualified and absolute. Or understand it in some entirely different respect, then refute it that way. Aristotle’s example is that a Moor is black but has white

teeth. So he is black and not black at the same time.

That is an invented example that would not really fool anyone. Instead, take a case from actual experience.

Example. While discussing philosophy, I admitted that my system defended and praised the Quietists. We soon started talking about Hegel. I said most of what he had written was nonsense, or at least that many passages left the author to provide the words and the reader to provide their meaning. The opponent did not try to refute this claim on its own terms. He simply used my earlier admission against me: “You have just praised the Quietists, and they also wrote a lot of nonsense.”

I accepted this but corrected him. I was not praising the Quietists as philosophers or writers, for their *theoretical* work. I praised them only as people, for what they did, in a *practical* respect. With Hegel, we were discussing theoretical work. This blocked the attack.

The first three tricks are related. In each, the opponent actually talks about something different from the original claim. If we let that dispose of our claim, we miss the point of the argument. In all the examples, what the opponent says is true, but it only seems to contradict the claim. It does not really do so. The person attacked therefore denies the opponent’s inference: that because his statement is true, ours must be false. We directly refute his refutation by denying that conclusion follows.

Someone refuses to accept true premises because they can see what follows from them. The next two methods, rules 4 and 5, deal with this.

¹ [In the margin beside this:] The fallacy of treating a qualified statement as an unqualified statement. This is Aristotle’s second sophistical refutation that does not depend on wording: speaking absolutely, or not absolutely but in a particular respect, place, time or relation. *De sophist. elenchis*, c. 5.

Stratagem 4

When you want to draw a conclusion, do not let the opponent see it coming. Get them to accept the premises without noticing, one at a time and scattered through the conversation. Otherwise they will try all kinds of obstruction. If you doubt that they will accept the premises, put forward the premises supporting those premises. Construct preliminary arguments. Mix up the order of the premises belonging to several such arguments and get them accepted. Hide your game until everything you need has been accepted. Approach the issue indirectly, from a long way off. These rules appear in Arist. *Topic. Lib. VIII, c. 1*.¹

This needs no example.

¹ [Added note:] See *Adversaria* p 269 [in our edition, volumes VII and VIII].

Stratagem 5

¹ You can use false premises to prove your claim when the opponent would refuse the true ones. They may fail to recognize that the true premises are true, or see that your claim would immediately follow from them. In that case, use statements that are false in themselves but true from the opponent's point of view. Argue from their way of thinking and from what they accept. Truth can follow from false premises, although falsehood never follows from true premises. In the same way, you can refute the opponent's false statements using other false statements they believe are true. You are dealing with that person and must use their way of thinking. For example, if they belong to a sect whose views we reject, we can use that sect's statements as principles against them. Arist. *Top. VIII, c. 9*.

¹ [Later addition here:] This belongs to the previous passage.

Stratagem 6

Secretly assume what you should be proving, begging the question: 1) give it another name, such as good reputation instead of honor, or virtue instead of virginity. You can also use terms treated as interchangeable, such as red-blooded animals instead of vertebrates. 2) Get a general concession of what is disputed in a particular case. For example, when claiming that medicine is uncertain, assume that all human knowledge is uncertain. 3) When two statements imply each other and you need to prove one, assume the other. 4) When you need to prove the general claim, get each particular case accepted. This reverses number 2. (Arist. Top. VIII, c. 11.)

The final chapter of Aristotle's *Topica* gives useful rules for *practicing* dialectic.

Stratagem 7

When a debate is fairly strict and formal, and we want a clear understanding, the person who has made a claim and must prove it *asks the opponent questions*. The aim is to establish the claim's truth from the opponent's own admissions. The ancients often used this questioning method, also called the Socratic method. This trick and some later ones concern it. (*All freely adapted from Aristotle's Liber de elenchis sophisticis* c. 15.)¹

Ask many questions at once and in detail to hide what you really want accepted. Then present your argument from the accepted points quickly. People who understand slowly cannot follow it precisely. They miss any mistakes or gaps in the proof.

¹ [Added note:] *Adversaria* p 269 [in our edition, volumes VII and VIII].

Stratagem 8

Make the opponent angry. Anger prevents them from judging correctly or recognizing what helps their own case. You can anger them by openly treating them unfairly, harassing them and generally behaving rudely.

Stratagem 9

Ask the questions in a mixed-up order, not in the order your conclusion requires. The opponent will not know where you are going and cannot prepare a defense. Depending on their answers, you can also use them to draw different conclusions, even opposite ones. Like trick 4, this hides what you are doing.

Stratagem 10

Suppose the opponent deliberately says no to questions whose yes answers would support your claim. Ask about the opposite of the statement you need, as if that were the one you wanted accepted. Or give them both statements to choose from, so they cannot see which answer you want.

Stratagem 11

If you are making an induction and the opponent accepts the individual cases you need for it, do not ask whether they also accept the general truth that follows. Bring it in later as already settled and accepted. Sometimes they will then

believe they accepted it themselves. The listeners will think so too. They remember the many questions about individual cases and assume these must have achieved their purpose.

Stratagem 12

If a general concept has no name of its own and needs a figurative comparison to describe it, choose one that helps your claim from the start. For example, the names *serviles* and *liberales* for Spain's two political parties were surely chosen by the latter party.

Protestants chose that name for themselves, as well as Evangelicals. Catholics chose the name *heretics* for them.

This also applies to names used more literally. If the opponent suggests a *change*, call it a "*newfangled idea*," because that expression is hostile. Reverse this if you are the person proposing it. In the first case, call the opposite "the established order." In the second, call it "outdated custom." A completely neutral, impartial person might say "religious worship" or "public religious teaching." A supporter says "piety" or "godliness," while an opponent says "bigotry" or "superstition." This subtly begs the question. You put what you want to prove into the word or name in advance. It then follows merely by analyzing that word. What one person calls "securing someone" or "taking them into custody," the opponent calls "locking them up." Speakers often reveal their intentions in advance through the names they use. One says "the clergy," the other "those priests." People use this trick more often than any other, instinctively. Religious enthusiasm $\equiv$ fanaticism. A slip or a romantic adventure $\equiv$ adultery. Double meanings $\equiv$ dirty jokes. Having money trouble $\equiv$ bankruptcy. "Through influence and connections" $\equiv$ "through bribery and favoritism toward relatives." "Genuine gratitude" $\equiv$ "good pay."

Stratagem 13

To get someone to accept a statement, offer its opposite as the other choice. Describe that opposite in such extreme terms that, to avoid seeming unreasonable, they have to accept our statement, which looks quite believable beside it. For example, we want them to admit that a person must do everything their father tells them. We ask, “Should people always disobey their parents, or obey them?” Or someone has said something happens “often.” We ask whether “often” means few cases or many. They will say “many.” It is like putting gray next to black and calling it white, or next to white and calling it black.

Stratagem 14

A shameless trick is to ask several questions and then announce triumphantly that the answers prove the conclusion you want, although the answers did not favor it and it does not follow from them at all. This can work well if the opponent is shy or stupid and you have plenty of shamelessness and a powerful voice. It is the fallacy of treating something that is not a cause as a cause.

Stratagem 15

Suppose we have made a surprising claim that we do not know how to prove. Give the opponent a true statement whose truth is not completely obvious, and ask them to accept or reject it. Make it look as if we intend to use it as our proof. If suspicion makes them reject it, show that their position is absurd and celebrate the victory. If they accept it, at least we have said something sensible

for now and must see what to do next. Or add the previous trick and claim that our surprising statement has now been proved. This takes extreme shamelessness, but it does happen, and some people do all this by instinct.

Stratagem 16

Arguments based on the opponent's own position or concessions.¹ Look for something in their claim that conflicts with what they have said or accepted before. If necessary, an apparent conflict will do. It might conflict with the rules of a school or sect they praised and approved, with the behavior of that sect's followers, even its false or supposed followers, or with what the opponent does or fails to do. For example, if they defend suicide, immediately shout, "Why don't you hang yourself?" If they claim Berlin is an unpleasant place to live, shout, "Why don't you leave on the next express mail coach?" You can surely find some objection to make trouble for them.

¹ See Hefte Appendix B zu B. 122 [of the "Lectures"; in our edition, Bd. IX, S. 511,1—33].

Stratagem 17

When the opponent presses us with a proof against our position, we can often escape by making a subtle distinction that admittedly had not occurred to us before. This works if the matter allows two meanings or two different cases.

Stratagem 18

If the opponent has found an argument that will defeat us, we must prevent that outcome and stop them from finishing it. Interrupt the debate in time. Break away or change its direction and lead it to other statements. In short, change the question being argued about.¹

¹ [Later addition beside this in the margin:] See trick 29 on this.

Stratagem 19

The opponent specifically asks us to challenge a particular part of their claim, but we have nothing useful to say. We must make the issue much more general and argue against that instead. We are asked why a particular hypothesis in physics cannot be trusted. We talk about how unreliable human knowledge is and illustrate this in various ways.

Stratagem 20

After the opponent has accepted the premises we asked about, do not ask them to accept the conclusion too. Draw it yourself. Even if one or another premise is still missing, treat it as accepted and draw the conclusion. This is another case of treating a non-cause as a cause.

Stratagem 21

If we see through an opponent's misleading or sophistical argument, we could dismantle it by explaining its deceptive appearance. But it is better to answer with an equally misleading, sophistical counterargument and dispose of it that way. Winning, not truth, is what matters. If they argue from what we have accepted, it is enough to counter with an argument from what they have accepted. In general, when an argument based on the opponent's own position is available, it is quicker to use it than to give a long explanation of the actual facts.

Stratagem 22

If the opponent asks us to accept something from which the disputed conclusion would immediately follow, refuse by calling it an assumption of what they are supposed to prove. The opponent and the listeners will easily mistake a closely related statement for the disputed claim itself. We thus take away their best argument.

Stratagem 23

Being contradicted and drawn into a dispute tempts people to *exaggerate* their claims. By contradicting the opponent, we can provoke them to push beyond the truth a statement that might be true if properly limited. After we refute the exaggerated version, it looks as if we have refuted the original too. We must guard against this ourselves. Contradiction must not tempt us to exaggerate or

broaden our own claim. The opponent may also directly try to make our statement broader than we made it. Stop them immediately and bring them back to its limits: “That is what I said, and nothing more.”

Stratagem 24

Inventing consequences. Use false reasoning and twisted concepts to force absurd or dangerous statements out of the opponent’s claim. These statements are not actually contained in it and are not what the opponent means. But they appear to follow from the claim and to contradict either themselves or accepted truths. This passes for an indirect refutation, *apagoge*. It again treats something that is not a cause as a cause.

Stratagem 25

This concerns *refutation* through a *counterexample*, *exemplum in contrarium*. Induction needs many cases to establish its general claim. Refutation needs only one case to which the claim does not apply, and the claim is overturned. Such a case is called a counterexample, *enstasis*, *exemplum in contrarium*, *instantia*. For instance, camels alone disprove the statement “All animals that chew the cud have horns.” A counterexample falls within the main concept covered by a general truth, but that truth does not hold for it. It therefore overturns the whole general claim. Yet this can involve deception. When the opponent gives counterexamples, check: 1) Is the example actually true? Sometimes the only true answer to a problem is that the case did not happen, as with many miracles and ghost stories. 2) Does the example really belong under the concept the general claim concerns? It often only seems to. A precise distinction can settle this. 3) Does it really contradict the general claim? Again, it often only seems to.

Stratagem 26

A brilliant move is to turn an argument around, *retorsio argumenti*. The argument the opponent wants to use for their position can work better against it. They say, “He is a child; we must allow him some leeway.” Reply, “It is precisely because he is a child that he must be punished, so he does not become fixed in his bad habits.”

Stratagem 27

If an argument unexpectedly makes the opponent especially angry, keep pressing it. Making them angry is useful in itself. But their anger also suggests that you have touched a weakness in their reasoning. There is probably more to attack at that point than you can yet see.

Stratagem 28

This is mainly useful when knowledgeable people argue in front of listeners who lack their knowledge. If you have no argument about the issue, not even one based on the opponent’s own position, make one *aimed at the audience*. Give an invalid objection that only an expert can recognize as invalid. The opponent is an expert, but the listeners are not. To them, the opponent appears beaten, especially if the objection makes the claim look ridiculous. People are quick to laugh, and you have the people laughing on your side. To show that the objection is worthless, the opponent would need a long explanation going back to the principles of the science or other subject. It is hard to get people to listen to that.

Example. The opponent says that when the oldest rocks formed, the material from which granite and the other oldest rocks crystallized was liquid because of heat: it was molten. Its temperature must have been about 200° R. The material crystallized under the sea covering it. We appeal to the audience by saying that at that temperature, or even much earlier at 80°, the sea would already have boiled away and be floating in the air as vapor. The audience laughs. To beat us, the opponent would have to explain that the boiling point depends just as much on atmospheric pressure as on temperature. Once perhaps half the seawater is suspended as vapor, that pressure becomes so high that water does not boil even at 200° R. But the opponent never gets to explain this, since people without knowledge of physics would need a lengthy account.

(Mitscherlich, Abhdlg. d. Berl. Akad. 1822.)

Stratagem 29

When you notice that¹ you are losing, make a *diversion*. Suddenly start talking about something entirely different, as if it belonged to the issue and were an argument against the opponent. This is somewhat restrained if it still concerns the general question. It is shameless if it concerns only the opponent and says nothing about the issue.

For example, I praised China for having no hereditary nobility and granting offices only through examinations. My opponent said learning qualified people for office no more than the advantages of birth, which he respected. His argument then started going badly. He immediately changed the subject to the fact that all social classes in China were punished by beating the soles of their feet. He connected this with their heavy tea drinking and criticized the Chinese for both. Anyone who immediately took up all these points would have been distracted and let an already-secured victory slip away.

The diversion is shameless if it abandons the question entirely and starts, for example, “Yes, and you were also claiming something like that the other day, and so on.” It then partly becomes a personal attack, which the last trick dis-

cusses. Strictly speaking, it lies between attacking the person, *argumentum ad personam*, discussed there, and arguing from the person's own position, *argumentum ad hominem*.

Quarrels among ordinary people show how nearly natural this trick is. When one accuses the other personally, the other answers with personal accusations of their own instead of refuting the first ones. They leave the accusations against themselves standing and so seem to admit them. They act like Scipio, who attacked the Carthaginians in Africa instead of Italy.(?) This sort of diversion can sometimes work in war. It is bad in a quarrel: it leaves the accusations unanswered and tells the listener everything bad about both sides. In debates people commonly use it because they have nothing better.

¹ [The later addition beside this in the margin:] Related to trick 18.

Stratagem 30

An appeal to authority. Replace reasons with authorities chosen to suit the opponent's knowledge. Seneca says, "Everyone would rather believe than judge." We therefore have an easy task if we can cite an authority the opponent respects. The less knowledge and ability they have, the more authorities they will accept. Someone with first-rate knowledge and ability will accept very few, almost none. They may accept specialists in a science, art or craft they know little or nothing about, but even then with distrust. Ordinary people, by contrast, deeply respect specialists of every kind. They do not know that people who make their living from a subject love the income, not the subject. Nor do they know that teachers seldom know their subject thoroughly, since people who study it thoroughly usually have no time left to teach. The general public respects many authorities. If none quite fits, use one that seems to fit. Quote something said in a different sense or different circumstances. Authorities the opponent does not understand usually have the greatest effect. Uneducated people have a special respect for Greek and Latin phrases. If needed, you can

distort authorities, falsify them, or even invent them yourself. The opponent usually has neither the book available nor the knowledge of how to use it. A fine example is the French parish priest who did not want to pave the street outside his house, as the other citizens had to. He quoted a biblical saying: “paveant illi, ego non pavebo”—“Let them be afraid; I will not be afraid.” This persuaded the local officials. *Common prejudices* can also serve as authorities. Most people think like Aristotle: “What many believe, we say is so.” I think this is in the Nicomachean Ethics. There is no opinion so absurd that people will not readily adopt it once persuaded that it is *widely accepted*. They follow examples in their thinking just as they do in their actions. They are sheep following the leading ram wherever he goes. Dying is easier for them than thinking. It is strange that an opinion’s wide acceptance matters so much to them. They can see from themselves how people adopt opinions simply by following others, without judging at all. But they do not see it, because they have no self-knowledge. Only the exceptional few say with Plato, “The many have many opinions.” That means the crowd has many foolish ideas in its head, and anyone who tried to pay attention to all of them would have plenty to do.

Seriously considered, *an opinion’s wide acceptance* proves nothing about whether it is right. It does not even make it more probable. People who think otherwise must assume 1) that distance in *time* removes its force as evidence. Otherwise they would have to bring back all the old errors once widely accepted as truths, such as the Ptolemaic system, or restore Catholicism in every Protestant country. 2) They must assume that distance in *space* does the same. Otherwise the wide acceptance of different beliefs among Buddhists, Christians and Muslims will cause them difficulties. (Following Bentham, *Tactique des assemblées législatives*, Vol 2, p 76.)

Look closely at what people call *public opinion* and it is the opinion of two or three people. Watching how a generally accepted opinion develops would convince us of this. Two or three people first adopt it, put it forward or assert it. Others kindly trust that they have examined it thoroughly. Assuming these people are capable enough, a few more adopt the opinion. Many others then believe these people. Laziness tells them to believe at once rather than do the

hard work of checking first. The number of lazy, easily convinced followers grows each day. Once enough people support the opinion, later followers assume it could only have gained that support through strong reasons. The remaining people now have to accept the common belief. Otherwise they would be seen as troublemakers resisting accepted opinion, as arrogant fellows who think they know better than everyone else. Agreement becomes a duty. The few who can judge must now keep quiet. Those allowed to speak cannot form opinions or judgments of their own. They merely echo someone else's opinion, but defend it all the more eagerly and intolerantly. They hate dissenters less for their different beliefs than for daring to judge for themselves. They never try to do that themselves and secretly know it. In short, few people can think, but everyone wants opinions. So what can they do but take ready-made opinions from others instead of making their own? Given this, what are the voices of a hundred million people worth? About as much as a historical fact reported by a hundred historians when we discover that they all copied one another. Everything finally rests on one person's statement. (Following Bayle, *Pensées sur les Comètes*, Vol I, p 10.)

"I say it, you say it, and finally he said it too:

After all this repeating, you see nothing but what was said."

Even so, you can use public opinion as an authority when arguing with ordinary people.

When two ordinary minds argue, they usually choose authorities as their shared weapon and attack each other with them. A better mind dealing with someone like this should also use that weapon, choosing authorities that exploit the opponent's weaknesses. Against the weapon of reasons the opponent is, by assumption, a Siegfried with horn-like armor, dipped in the flood of his inability to think and judge.

In court, arguments actually rely only on authorities: the established authority of the laws. Judgment finds the law, the authority that applies to the particular case.¹ But dialectic still has plenty of room to work. If necessary, a case and a law that do not really fit can be twisted until people think they fit, and the reverse can happen too.

¹ See Cogitata p 116 [in our edition, volumes VII and VIII].

Stratagem 31

When you cannot answer the opponent's reasons, declare with quiet irony that you are not capable: "What you are saying is beyond my limited understanding. It may be quite correct, but I cannot understand it, so I will not judge." This hints to listeners who respect you that the argument is nonsense. When the Critique of Pure Reason appeared, or rather when it first attracted attention, many professors of the old eclectic school said, "We do not understand that." They thought this disposed of it. But when followers of the new school showed that they were right and really did not understand it, they became very bad-tempered.

Use this trick only if you are sure the listeners respect you much more than the opponent, as a professor might be respected more than a student. This really belongs to the previous trick. It is a particularly spiteful way of relying on your own *authority* instead of reasons. The response is: "Excuse me, with your great insight, this must be easy for you to understand. My poor explanation must be the only problem." Then spoon-feed them the explanation until they have to understand it, whether they want to or not. It becomes clear that they simply failed to understand it before. The argument is turned back: they hinted that we were talking nonsense, but we have proved their failure to understand. Both moves are made with perfect politeness.

Stratagem 32

Quickly dismiss the opponent's claim, or at least make it suspicious, by putting it in a disliked category. A resemblance or loose connection will do. Say, for example, "That is Manichaeism; that is Arianism; that is Pelagianism; that is idealism; that is Spinozism; that is pantheism; that is Brownianism; that is natu-

ralism; that is atheism; that is rationalism; that is spiritualism; that is mysticism,” and so on. We assume two things: 1) the claim is identical to that category, or at least included in it. So we say, “Oh, we already know about that!” 2) The whole category has been refuted already and cannot contain a word of truth.

Stratagem 33

“It may be right in theory, but it is wrong in practice.” This accepts the reasons but rejects what follows from them. It breaks the rule that a valid inference leads from a reason to its consequence. The claim is impossible: what is correct in theory must also apply in practice. If it does not, the theory contains an error. Something has been overlooked or left out of account, so it is wrong in theory as well.

Stratagem 34

If the opponent avoids directly answering a question or argument, responding with another question, an indirect answer or something irrelevant, and tries to go elsewhere, this is a sure sign that we have touched a weak spot, sometimes without knowing it. They have gone silent *on that particular point*. Keep pressing the point and do not let them move away from it, even if you cannot yet see exactly what weakness you have found.

Stratagem 35

Whenever this trick is possible, it makes all the others unnecessary. Instead of giving reasons to influence the intellect, give motives to influence the will. The opponent is immediately won over to our opinion, as are any listeners who

share the opponent's interests, even if our opinion came from a madhouse. One lot-weight of will usually outweighs one centner-weight of insight and conviction. This works only in particular circumstances. If the opponent feels that their opinion, if accepted, would seriously harm their interests, they will drop it as quickly as a hot iron they carelessly picked up.

For example, a clergyman defends a philosophical doctrine. Let him notice that it indirectly contradicts a basic doctrine of his church, and he will drop it.

A landowner praises machinery in England, where a steam engine does the work of many people. Suggest that steam engines will soon pull carriages too, so the horses in his large stud will fall sharply in value. We will see what happens. In these cases, people generally feel, "How thoughtlessly we make an unfair law against ourselves."

The same applies if the audience belongs with us to a sect, guild, trade, club or the like, but the opponent does not. However right the opponent's claim is, we need only hint that it harms the group's common interests. The listeners will find the opponent's arguments weak and pathetic, however good they are. They will find ours correct and effective, even if we have made them up out of thin air. The group will speak loudly for us and the opponent will leave in embarrassment. The listeners will usually believe they voted out of sincere conviction. What harms our interests generally seems absurd to our intellect. The intellect is not a dry light, and so on. This trick could be called "grabbing the tree at its root." It is usually called an argument from usefulness.¹

¹ See *Cogitata* p 280 [in our edition, volumes VII and VIII].

Stratagem 36

Overwhelm and confuse the opponent with meaningless talk. This works because:

"People usually think, when all they hear is words,
There must be something there they can make sense of."

Suppose the opponent secretly knows their own weakness. They are used to hearing things they do not understand and pretending they do. You can impress them by seriously spouting nonsense that sounds learned or profound and leaves them unable to hear, see or think clearly. Present it as the strongest possible proof of your claim. In recent times, as everyone knows, some philosophers have used this trick with brilliant success, even before the entire German public. But examples are offensive, so we will take an older example from Goldsmith, *Vicar of Wakefield*, p 34.

Stratagem 37

(This should be among the first tricks.) The opponent may be right about the matter but luckily choose a poor proof. We can easily refute that proof and pretend this refutes the matter itself. We are really treating an argument against the opponent's proof as an argument against the actual claim. If neither the opponent nor the people present can think of a better proof, we win. For example, someone might give the ontological proof that God exists, which can certainly be refuted. This is how bad lawyers lose a good case. They try to justify it with a law that does not apply and cannot think of the law that does.

Stratagem 38

If you see that the opponent is better at this and you are going to lose, get personal, insulting and rude. This means leaving the issue, where your case is lost, and attacking the person arguing with you. We could call it an *argumentum ad personam*. It differs from an *argumentum ad hominem*, which leaves the strictly objective issue to focus on what the opponent has said or accepted about it. A personal attack abandons the issue altogether and attacks the opponent as a person. It becomes hurtful, spiteful, insulting and rude. It turns from mental powers to physical powers, or to animal behavior. This is popular

because anyone can do it, so it is used often.¹ What can the other person do in response? If they use the same method, it turns into a fight, a duel or a court case over insults.

It would be a great mistake to think it is enough not to get personal yourself. Calmly showing someone that they are wrong, and therefore thinking and judging wrongly, as every victory in a debate does, makes them more bitter than a rude insult would. Why? As Hobbes says in *de Cive*, c. 1, “All pleasure and joy in the mind depend on having others to compare ourselves with, so we can think highly of ourselves.” People value nothing more than satisfying their vanity, and no wound hurts more than a wound to it. This produces sayings like “Honor matters more than life.” Satisfying vanity mainly comes from comparing ourselves with others, in every respect, but especially in mental abilities. Debating makes that comparison happen very effectively and strongly. This is why the defeated person feels bitter even though no wrong has been done to them. They turn to the last resort, this final trick. Being polite yourself will not stop it. But great calm can help here too. As soon as the opponent attacks you personally, calmly say that it is irrelevant. Return immediately to the issue and keep showing why they are wrong, ignoring their insults. In effect, answer as Themistocles answered Eurybiades: “Hit me, but listen.” Not everyone can do this.

The only safe response is therefore the one Aristotle gives in the last chapter of the *Topica*. Do not argue with just anyone. Argue only with people you know have enough understanding not to produce complete absurdities and be embarrassed by them. They must be able to argue with reasons rather than declarations of authority, and to listen to reasons and engage with them. Finally, they must value truth, welcome good reasons even from the opponent, and be fair enough to bear losing when truth is on the other side. This means that barely one person in a hundred is worth debating. Let the rest say what they want. Being foolish is everyone’s right. Remember Voltaire’s words: “Peace is worth even more than truth.” An Arabic saying goes, “Peace hangs as the fruit on the tree of silence.”

The friction between minds in debate can often help both people correct their thoughts and develop new ideas. But the two must be fairly equal in learning and mental ability. If one lacks learning, they will not understand everything and will not be at the same level. If they lack mental ability, the resulting bitterness will lead them into dishonesty and tricks, or rudeness.²

There is no essential difference between a debate in private, familiar conversation and a formal public debate for a degree or a similar purpose. Perhaps the differences are that in the public debate the respondent is always supposed to beat the opponent, so the presiding official helps if necessary, and that the arguments are more formal, often put into strict syllogistic form.

¹ [Note in the margin beside this:] See Foliant p 261 [in our edition, volumes VII and VIII].

² Spic[ilegia] 334 [in our edition, volumes VII and VIII].