

# Being Right, Admitting that Someone is Right, Being Judged Right

(Translation of 'Gelijk hebben, geven, krijgen')

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 groningen**

*Dutch original:*  
<http://philosophy.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/root/Krabbe/...>  
translated by the author

*Mr. Rector Magnificus,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The tension between being right and continuously failing to be judged right is something we have all experienced.<sup>1</sup> Gosh, how right we are at times, and if we are not judged right then others are to blame, others who refuse to admit that we are right. Our clinching arguments persistently meet a wall of misunderstanding, or even maliciousness, whereas any sane person ought to be able to see how reasonably these arguments prove our point. Even so, our adversary brags about her own efforts to contribute to reasonable argument and discussion, at the same time tenaciously refusing to admit our point of view. Could it be, from her point of view, that she meets with as much misunderstanding as we do? We shall never agree. Nevertheless, we perceive that both of us are aware, more or less, of what it takes to have a reasonable discussion.

Shouldn't a reasonable discussion be so structured that whoever is right will also be judged right? Actually, no, that would be too much: the party in the right could offer such meager arguments for his point of view that the other cannot reasonably be expected to admit that this party is in the right. But ought it not to be the case that whoever is right *can* be judged right? What I mean to say is this: is part of what we mean by reasonable discussion not constituted by the possibility for the party in the right to structure his arguments in such a way that the other party will, by the rules of the same reasonable discussion, be forced to admit that the first party is right, with the consequence that the first party will not only be right, but also be judged right? In other words: granted that the party in the right will not always be judged right, there ought, nevertheless, to exist some reasonable road leading to his being judged right. But does that hold?

And even if it does, one needs, as the party in the right, to possess the technical skills that allow one to find that reasonable road and to travel along it to the end. Logic and dialectic (the theory of argumentation), and even rhetoric eagerly offer the necessary skills; rhetoric, by the way, not being too fussy about the requirement of reasonableness. What needs to be done, therefore, is that we serve our apprenticeship with these fine disciplines.

That, of course, is no news. And today, in this very last lecture, I am not going to tell you anything new; for by doing so I would make myself vulnerable to reproaches of not having told these things before, in my regular classes, and having kept them from you until now. No way! Therefore, expect no novelties today. I even propose to go back to the early seventeenth century, the age of the elder Christiaan Huygens, the father of Maurits and Constantijn, and the grandfather of the famous physicist. The elder Huygens, too, realized that it would be worth while to study the fields of logic and dialectic, and he decided to obtain instruction in them for his sons, Maurits and Constantijn. For that purpose he took on a new tutor in 1612: the Scottish philosopher George Eglisam, who had proved his mettle in France. He also attended the lessons himself in the hope of learning something. His son, Constantijn Huygens, later wrote a memoir of these lessons, and since the present occasion resembles a last

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks are due to John North for suggesting the English title as well as for pointing out several mistakes and to David Atkinson for a thorough revision of this translation.

day of school, I may as well read to you some passages from this memoir.<sup>2</sup> The text has been translated from the Latin original by C. L. Heesakkers.

Within a few weeks we managed to digest a treatise about debates, that he had also dictated to us and that wasn't bad at all. Add to that the daily exercises in reasoning with syllogisms, and my father's purpose had been achieved. Eglisam, however, had noticed that he confronted some inquisitive boys. He started to urge my father that, after these first explorations along the coast, we should dare to take our boat to the open seas, following a course that his own enthusiasm would show to our noble boyish minds[...].

As a tame company, we followed the encouragements of our commander, First we were led by lecture notes through a most boring tangle of logical preliminaries about what he called the division of words. Then we were sorrily dragged along by even more extensive twaddle, in a second set of lecture notes about the supposition or meaning of words. When we finally thought to have covered quite a lot of ground, we discovered that we had not yet advanced beyond the entrance hall of this discipline. Only now was he truly prepared for his beloved dialectic. Carrying Aristotle's complete *Organon* and search me what works by Toledo or Fonseca he mounted, in his characteristic way, the professorial lectern. And in the same way that he used to lead the youth of Paris or Rouen along the academic road (or rather up the garden path), so did he gradually lead us and our dad, who in vain urged speed, astray.

Thus we proceeded, mostly at the break of dawn [...] to our teacher. Formidable piles of useless lecture notes did we take down. [...]

[...] Many times, I saw the good man glow with pleasure when during that boring and colorless scholastic nitpicking he paraded in between the pupils' benches. How nicely are things arranged by nature. To avoid that the scholastic disciplines would waste away, she takes care that people exist who apply themselves to these cavils with an eagerness as if they got hold of the brains of Jupiter himself. It is the same as for the human race itself. That race would perish, were it not arranged that we, if needs be against our wishes, were driven by the stimulus of lust to perform that utterly filthy act required by nature.

At last then, by those most boring wanderings mentioned above, that lasted for ten whole months, we reached the next summer. As tired travelers we arrived at the end of logic.<sup>3</sup>

Well, now that I am approaching the end, something in this passage strikes me as familiar. If you go into matters of logic, you will soon find yourself entangled in a jungle of subtle distinctions that seem to keep you at a distance from what you suppose to be the field's core business. It has been that way for ages, and the introduction of set theory hasn't done anything to ease these feelings. Apparently, the field has an internal dynamism that causes it to transform seemingly simple matters into more complicated affairs. But sometimes the other direction, towards more simplicity and unification, is taken. Some will remember the nitpicking about parentheses and quotation marks of many different kinds. Nowadays, you don't hear about that anymore. So sometimes complications go simply out of fashion.

My first publication, from 1978, is one of those loaded with sets – and scattered with Greek and Gothic letters, and of course a lot of special symbols. Yet the theorem that was proved in it was rather simple.<sup>4</sup> this theorem says that *whoever is right can be judged right*, that is to say that means exist for the party in the right to be judged right in a discussion, whatever the objections of the adversary (and, by the way, also the converse theorem: that whoever has the means that guarantee being judged right, must be right). That was not new, even in those days, but a proof for it with that many sets had not been published before.

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<sup>2</sup> At this point the first slide was shown displaying the book *Mijn jeugd* [My youth] by Constantijn Huygens. The slides used in the presentation will all be mentioned where they occurred, but only a selection of them has been included in this text.

<sup>3</sup> English translation by the present author of the Dutch translation of Constantijn Huygens's Latin text. This Dutch translation, by C.L. Heesakkers, is contained in Huygens (1987), pp. 104-107.

<sup>4</sup> At this point Slide 2 was shown, containing a formulation of the theorem.

I don't think this to be the appropriate occasion to recapitulate the proof. But I would like to expand a little on the theorem. In order to do so, I shall amplify on the concepts of 'discussion' and 'being right' and especially on that of 'being judged right'.

As to 'discussion': the theorem does not refer to discussions of all kinds, but exclusively to argumentative discussions in which points of view are taken, disputed, and defended. The discussion must have some content: there must be at least one assertion to which one of the participants commits himself. Also, the rules of discussion must satisfy certain conditions of reasonableness. For instance, it ought to be excluded that a participant who has never before asserted a falsehood is suddenly forced to concede a falsehood. These conditions of reasonableness must first be carefully laid down in a discussion model (we shall not pursue this here).

By 'being right' I presently mean announcing a point of view that is in accordance with the truth. Even if you were to assert something that is beyond your ken, but happens to be the case, you would be right in this sense, be it accidentally. In order to prove the theorem one should first give a precise definition of what is meant by someone's point of view being in accordance with the truth. That can be done by logical semantics (but we shall not pursue that here either). Note that it is not the case that logical semantics, in a given situation, always permits one to establish who is right. We are here concerned exclusively with the *definitions* of the concepts of 'truth' and of 'being right'.

Finally, the meaning of 'can be judged right'. This is not presently meant to refer to the mere possibility that one is judged right, but to a stronger feature, namely the existence of means that will, in a reasonable and argumentative discussion, enforce one's being judged right. What this is supposed to mean can be clarified by concepts of *game theory*. For, given that discussions consist of structured sequences of turns displaying statements and rejoinders, game theory can be applied to them. Turns in a discussion are equal to moves in a game and given a sequence of moves in a game only certain continuations are possible. For the game of chess the possible sequences of moves are determined by the rules of that game, and in the same way this is effected for discussions by rules of discussion. For real-life discussions this may not right away be obvious, but for models of discussion one may see to it that they work that way. Consequently, concepts of game theory can be applied to models of discussion. Using such concepts, one may give a more precise definition of what it means to say that one 'can be judged right'.

Let us see how this works by studying a very simple game, the game of Nim. In Nim there are two players, who move alternately. On the table there are some piles of matches. A move consists of the removal of one or more matches. Those matches have to be taken away from one and the same pile, the number does not matter: you may take away the whole pile, if you want. The one who picks up the last match loses the game, and the other wins. To keep things easy, we shall restrict our study to the game Nim-2,2, in which there are two piles at the start, with two matches in each pile. The player who starts will be called 'White' and the other player 'Black'.

On the next slide you see a tournament of Nim-2,2 (*Figure 1*). Study this slide from top to bottom. First there are two piles of two matches. Then White takes away one match from one of the piles, with the result that there is one pile of two matches left, as well as a pile consisting of one isolated match. Next Black takes away the isolated match: now there is only one pile left, consisting of two matches. White takes away one of these matches, thus forcing Black to take away the very last match and lose the tournament. Shame on you, Black, there was more for you in it!

## Een spelletje Nim-2,2

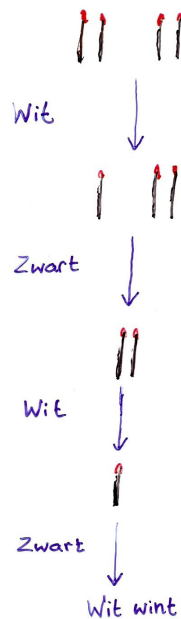


Figure 1: A tournament of Nim-2,2 (wit = white; zwart = black; wint = wins; Slide 3)

The course taken by a discussion in which certain rules are observed can be rendered in the same way. At the top of the diagram one puts the initial situation, for instance one in which exactly one of the participants (the so-called Proponent) has taken a point of view; going down one lets each party in turn make a move, and at the end one of the parties has won the discussion; it being understood that, in the case of the Proponent, winning is equal to the other party's admission that the Proponent is right.

What we saw just now was only one of the possible tournaments according to the rules of Nim-2,2. There are of course more possibilities. Yet there are not that many. In fact just six. These six possible tournaments can be depicted in one survey of all the possibilities of the game (Figure 2). On this slide, each path from top to bottom depicts a possible tournament. On the extreme left one sees the tournament we just studied and in which White was the winner. But there are five more possibilities, and in three of them Black is the winner. At the top we once more see the initial situation: two piles of two matches; and below that two arrows going in different directions, corresponding to two options for White, namely (to the left) the option of taking away only one match, and (to the right) the option of taking away a whole pile of matches; there are no other options for White's first move. Below that, we see on the left three arrows representing three options for Black in that situation: to take away the isolated match, or to take away one of the pile of two, or to take away the whole pile of two. In this way all possibilities are taken into account.

In the case of discussions in which certain rules are observed, starting from a certain initial situation, one may depict the totality of possible discussions in the same way as in the case of Nim-2,2. At the top one depicts the initial situation, and each downward path corresponds to a possible course the discussion can take. At each

junction, whenever the party that is to make a move has several options, there is a downward arrow for each option. At the bottom there is a record of who has won the discussion.

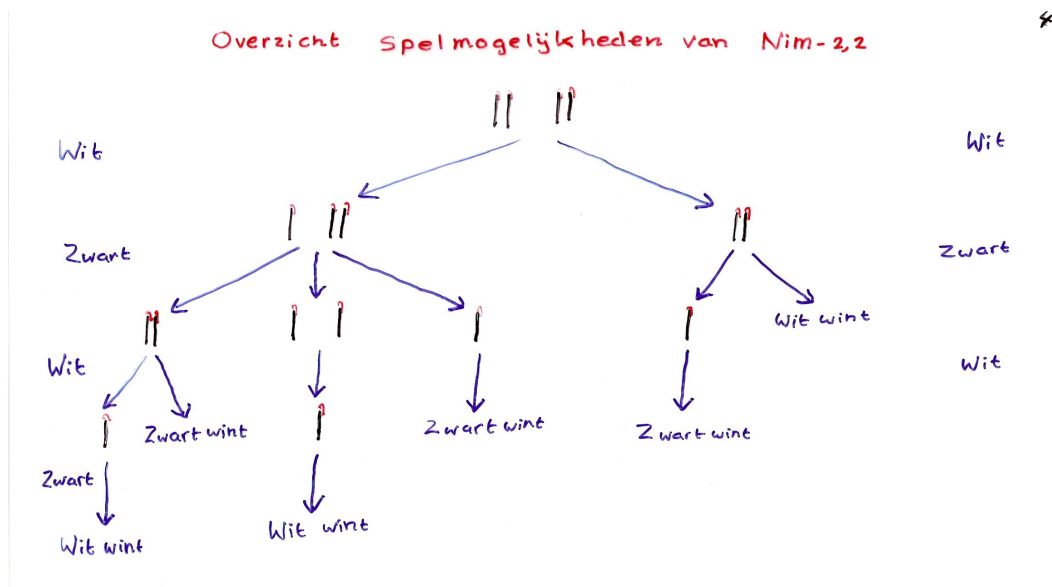


Figure 2: Survey of possibilities of the game Nim-2,2 (Slide 4)

A crucial concept of game theory, that can also be applied to discussions, is the concept of strategy. A player may decide beforehand what option he will take in any situation in which he might arrive according to the survey of possible tournaments, provided there is something to choose in that situation. In that way, he may make a plan that allows him to display an optimal performance in the game. A representation of a strategy, say for Black, can be obtained by removing certain options from the general survey of possible tournaments. For White, we still keep track of all the options, but for Black only of his strategically selected options, exactly one in each situation where Black has to make a choice. On the next slide (Figure 3), you see an example of a strategy for Black in the game Nim-2,2. At the start (at the top) both options for White have been taken into account; on the next line, however, in both cases only one strategic option for Black has been taken into account. At the next level, both on the left and on the right, all White's options for his second move are taken into account. On the left there are two options and on the right there is only one. When Black plays the game according to this strategy, it will still be possible that White wins the tournament (see the tournament on the far left). You ought to do better, Black!

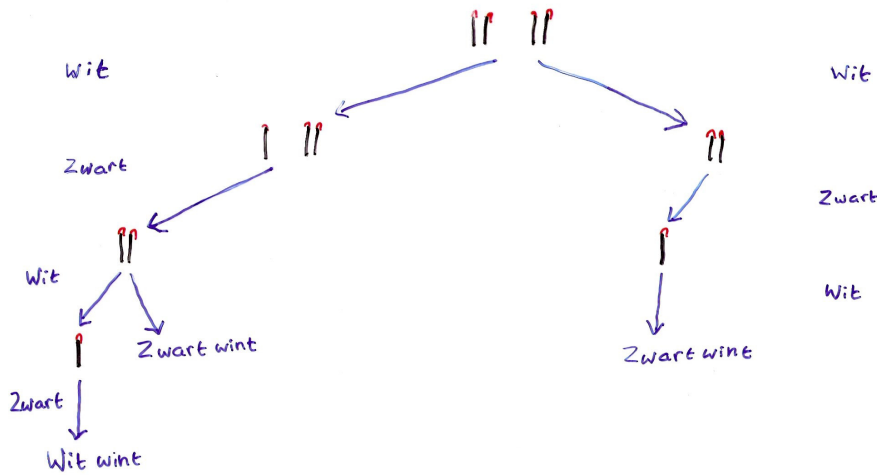


Figure 3: A strategy for Black in Nim-2,2 (Slide 5)

Indeed, Black can do better. The fact is that, in Nim-2,2, there exists a winning strategy for Black, that is to say a strategy that will allow him always to win. The next slide shows that this winning strategy is really very simple (Figure 4). Once more, both options for White at the start of the game are taken into account. In the left branch Black should take away the pile of two matches, and in the right branch Black should take away one of the two matches from the only pile there is. Success guaranteed!

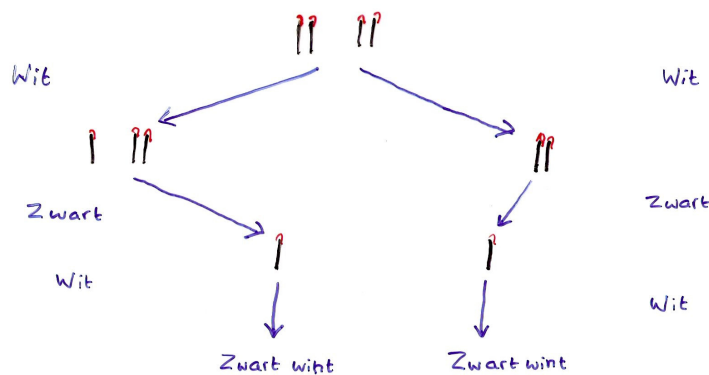


Figure 4: A winning strategy for Black in Nim-2,2 (Slide 6)

The meaning of ‘can be judged right’ here intended, can now be clarified. What does it mean that the Proponent – the one, as we said, who, at the start of the discussion, has taken a point of view, and who defends that point of view in the discussion – what does it mean that the Proponent can be judged right in the discussion? Nothing more nor less than that there exists a winning strategy for the Proponent, just as there exists one for Black in the game Nim-2,2. That is to say that the Proponent may select his moves in such a way that he will force the other to admit



that he is right, provided that both parties abide by the rules of discussion. The theorem that whoever is right can be judged right should, therefore, be understood as saying that for any Proponent taking a point of view in accordance with the truth, there exists a winning strategy. Moreover, as we said, for the discussions studied in the 1978 article, not only does this hold, but also the converse: whenever the Proponent has a winning strategy for a certain point of view, then this point of view must be in accordance with the truth.

It is, of course, nice to know that one may prove this theorem to hold for certain types of reasonable and argumentative discussion (for certain models of discussion). But what about practice? Does the theorem hold for real-life discussions? Or only in a weakened version? Or not at all? Indeed, it is not so easy to transfer this theorem from the world of rigorously determined discussion models to the world of formats of discussion that could be put into practice. I see at least five objections against the possibility of such a transfer. They are the following:<sup>5</sup> first of all, reasonable discussion can be made impossible by a divergence between the beliefs and the backgrounds of the parties concerned, and if reasonable discussion is impossible, the party in the right cannot win a reasonable discussion; second, discussions may get bogged down by interminable arguing about the rules of discussion; third, discussions often end in conceptual confusion and a stalemate; fourth, the willingness to admit that someone else is right is often lacking; fifth, the relevant data are often not available, with the result that once more the party in the right will not be judged right. The rest of this valedictory lecture will be devoted to a discussion, one by one, of these objections.

First, the objection that the beliefs and backgrounds of the parties may diverge to such an extent that any attempt to convince the other seems doomed to failure. In a drawer at my office, I keep a file with the title ‘crackpots’, containing correspondence in which various geniuses *manqués* propound their outlandish views. Often these views concern some alleged mistake in either the theory of relativity or in the proofs of Gödel’s incompleteness theorems; mistakes that have been overlooked by the ever so biased scientific community. But many other curious inventions and world views line up for inspection. Among these, one finds, for instance, the brilliant perception (announced as ‘the greatest invention of all times’) that atoms consist of space craft, populated by micro-beings, who in their turn consist of even smaller space craft, and so on and so forth.

At times someone will personally visit the university in order to explain his schematic analysis of the world. I remember that long ago, at the Faculty of Philosophy in Utrecht, we had regular visits of a Mr. B., who used to spread out large many-colored diagrams for that purpose. After a long and awkward conversation, I kindly suggested to Mr. B. to approach professor Van D., our logic professor, who would, so I said, be extremely interested.

In such a case one senses that being judged right is not on. Discussion seems pointless. No party will ever admit that the other party is right. In the same vein, it seems that vis-à-vis the Flat Earth Society<sup>6</sup> even a geophysicist cannot manage to be judged right. The adherents of a flat disk are usually much better prepared to enter the debate than their adversaries. Even gravity poses no problem: clearly the disk we live on has an upward acceleration of  $9.8 \text{ m/sec}^2$ . According to Einstein, this yields

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<sup>5</sup> At this point Slide 7 was shown, listing the five objections.

<sup>6</sup> See the article about the Flat Earth Society in the *Wikipedia* (Flat Earth Society, 2008).

exactly the same effect as gravity.<sup>7</sup> That whoever is right can be judged right, apparently fails to hold in such cases.

Even so, we should not exaggerate the egregiousness of crackpots. For one thing, not all crackpots are equal: Who knows, maybe there is indeed some error in the proof of one of Gödel's theorems, a fact that happens to have been discovered just now. Second, there is no sharp borderline between the outlandish views of the hard core crackpots and other beliefs that many hold, but others definitely don't. Where to place the belief that the gods were actually astronauts? Well, that's a bit outlandish, isn't it? What to do with UFO-theories? Astrology? Homeopathy? Reincarnation? (I see more and more faces setting in the audience.) But millions believe these things! OK, but millions don't. Third, one cannot exclude beforehand that vis-à-vis each crackpot that is really wrong, there exists, at a theoretical level, indeed a way to be judged right in a reasonable, argumentative discussion, but that one sees no way how to manage this in practice, and within some reasonable period of time. Thus the obstacles preventing sensible discussion with crackpots are practical rather than theoretical. Moreover, there is no way to refute all crackpots at once. Unfortunately, for each outlandish view, one has to start all over again.

The second objection against the idea that also in practice it might be the case that whoever is right can be judged right concerns the rules of discussion. The theorem makes sense only if one presupposes a definite format of discussion with fixed rules. But precisely the rules of discussion are permanently called into question. If one has to start by getting an agreement on those rules, one runs the risk of never getting to discussing the matters at issue. Some of you will remember the Paris Peace Conference about Vietnam (1968-69), where four whole months were spent discussing the shape of the negotiation table! Also, at any moment in the discussion of the matters at issue, a participant may restart a discussion about the rules of discussion; for instance, when one party accuses the other one of committing a fallacy, because a fallacy can be considered as a violation of one of the rules of discussion. There's the rub: a discussion about the discussion rules is itself a discussion (it is called a 'metadiscussion') that should be based on certain definite rules. Those rules could again be called into question (that is called a 'metametadiscussion'). And this could go on for a while (that is called an 'infinite regress'). But we are discussing practical matters, and in practice there is no infinite regress. Whereas the first objection (the one about the crackpots) was merely practical, but did not hold water in theory, we here meet with an objection that is merely theoretical, but does not hold in practice. Let us go fast forward to the third objection.

The third objection points out that discussions in practice, even when there is no quarrel about the rules of discussion, often end in conceptual confusion and a stalemate: all arguments may have been put forward, but the parties are still unable to reach agreement, except perhaps that they will agree to differ. And that may happen even before clarification has been obtained about the precise content of their difference. In such a case, neither party has won the discussion, let alone the party in the right. On reflection, this needn't interfere with the validity of the theorem at all. Indeed, that the Proponent is right does not imply that he knows that he is right, but only that his point of view accords with the truth; similarly, the existence of a winning strategy for the Proponent does not imply that the Proponent knows this strategy and

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<sup>7</sup> David Atkinson informed me that in this way the Flat Earth adherents would obtain a homogeneous field of gravity, contrary to the fact that gravity decreases with height.

can also deal with all possible conceptual confusions. Conceptual confusions and stalemates may, therefore, be caused by ignorance, even though there exists a strategy leading to conceptual clarification and success for the party in the right. It is even not to be excluded that the party that is originally in the right *loses* the discussion because of ignorance. But this phenomenon does not detract from the fact that it may be true that whoever is right *can* always be judged right.

Fourthly, the objection that the willingness to admit that someone is right is often lacking. When there is no admission that someone is right, there is no one who is judged right. This obstacle would not occur if the participants of discussions were always exclusively aiming at a reasonable solution of their difference of opinion. In fact, they want not only that, but also to come out as the winner. In the case of the Proponent, winning means being judged right and in the case of a pure Opponent – that is, an adversary of the Proponent who does not herself take a point of view, but all the same disputes the point of view of the Proponent – winning means getting the Proponent to withdraw his point of view. Both aims, resolving the difference of opinion by reasonable means and coming out as the winner of the discussion, are dialectical; that is to say, they both form part of reasonable behavior in discussion, provided that the first aim is given precedence over the second. When the desire to be oneself the winner of the discussion takes precedence, one leaves the realm of dialectic and enters that of pure rhetoric. Hence, the second aim, winning the discussion, may not only be characterized as dialectical, but also as rhetorical. For that reason I shall refer to one's commitment to this second goal by the term *rhetorico-dialectical commitment*. This term is so ugly that probably nobody will want to pinch it from me. (Acknowledgements go to Charles Sanders Peirce.<sup>8</sup>)

Well, I'm digressing. Where were we? The rhetorico-dialectical commitment. It is what makes discussants maneuver strategically, in the sense of Van Eemeren en Houtlosser.<sup>9</sup> That is to say that they select and formulate their moves, not only in order to resolve their difference of opinion, but also in order to end as the winner. To admit that the other is right appears, from this angle, not to constitute a good move, because it would imply that one has lost the discussion. But then one sometimes forgets that admitting that the other is right may happen to constitute a dialectically optimal move, because in dialectic being reasonable always takes precedence over pursuit of victory. Too great an eagerness to win the discussion may lead to a derailment of strategic maneuvering so that fallacies are committed and the party in the right fails to be judged right.

Thus one may understand why it is that the party in the right so often fails to be judged right: why admitting that someone is right is so hard, and therefore being judged right is so hard to achieve. Much research about argumentation concerns precisely this border area between dialectic (including logic) and rhetoric.<sup>10</sup> But, as regards our theorem, actually nothing against it has been posited. The theorem only claims that there exists a winning strategy for the party in the right in a *reasonable* discussion, implying a discussion without derailments of strategic maneuvering and such that the other party will control his unwillingness to admit that the first party is

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<sup>8</sup> According to Munitz (1981, p. 15) 'Peirce was quite dissatisfied with the way [William] James interpreted the essential ideas of pragmatism. [...] He therefore proposed to drop the term "pragmatism" as a label for his own doctrines and to use instead the term "pramaticism". He thought the latter term was "ugly enough to be safe from kidnapping" [Peirce (1905), see Peirce (1965, V.414, p. 277)]'.

<sup>9</sup> Van Eemeren & Houtlosser (2002).

<sup>10</sup> Van Eemeren & Houtlosser (eds.) (2002, 2006).

right. Even an acritic adversary, who knows that it is better to be reasonable and who wants to be reasonable, but who is all the same unreasonable, cannot count as a counterexample to the theorem, as my esteemed successor may be willing to acknowledge.<sup>11</sup>

Thus far we have managed more or less adequately to dispose of the objections against the possibility of transferring the theorem about being right and being judged right to the world of practical formats of discussion. But for the fifth objection, which points out that often the relevant data are not available, this approach will fail.

An example. Let us go back twenty-six centuries in thought. There is a famous tradition, according to which Phoenician sailors succeeded about that time at completing a circumnavigation of Africa. Imagine that in our age some people are having a discussion about whether this tradition is backed by a real occurrence of such a circumnavigation. Let a certain Probus be the Proponent of the point of view that this circumnavigation indeed took place and let Olga be the pure Opponent of that point of view. Olga, then, does not have a point of view of her own. Let us further assume that in reality the circumnavigation took place. Therefore Probus is right. But does he have a winning strategy? In order to convince Olga, Probus needs reliable sources. The only source available to Probus is a brief passage in the fourth book of *The Histories* of Herodotus. At a certain point in that book, Herodotus criticizes the geographical views of his predecessors: he laughs about the way they drew maps of the world, because, according to him, the world looked quite differently, namely as shown on the next slide (*Figure 5*):

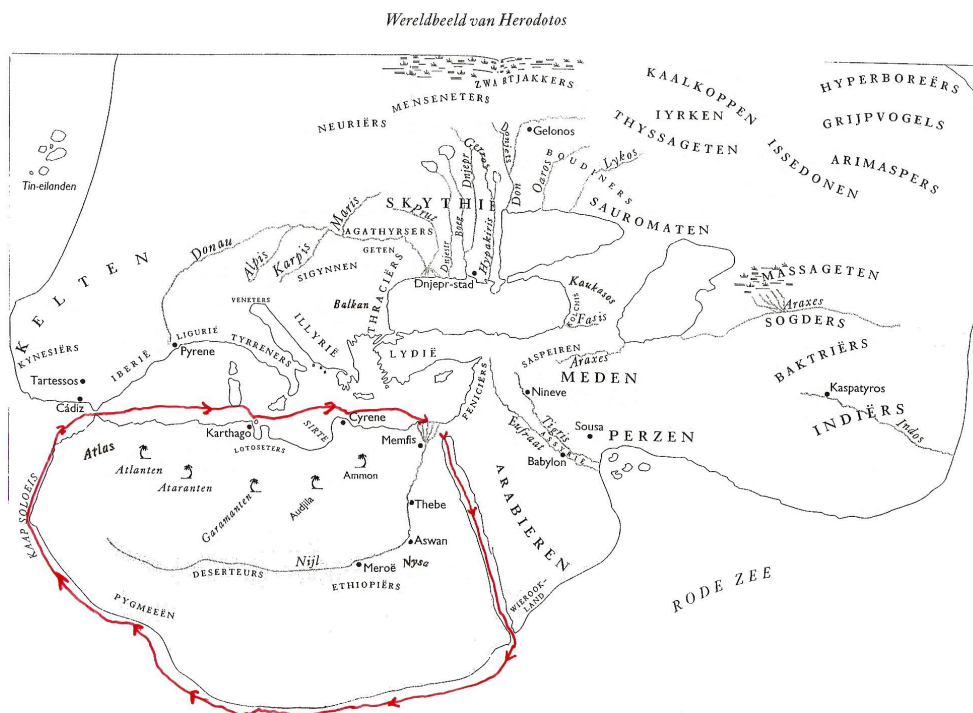


Figure 5: The world according to Herodotus (Slide 8)

<sup>11</sup> Peijnenburg (1996).

Herodotus wonders why the world is divided into Africa, Asia, and Europe, since Europe is as long (East-West) as the two others together, and is in breadth (North-South) beyond compare. He continues (in the translation by A. D. Godley):

For Libya [=Africa, EK] shows clearly that it is encompassed by the sea, save only where it borders on Asia; and this was proved first (as far as we know) by Necos king of Egypt. He, when he had made an end of digging the canal which leads from the Nile to the Arabian Gulf, sent Phoenicians in ships, charging them to sail on their return voyage past the Pillars of Heracles till they should come into the northern sea and so to Egypt. So the Phoenicians set out from the Red Sea and sailed the southern sea; whenever autumn came they would put in and sow the land, to whatever part of Libya they might come, and there await the harvest; then, having gathered in the crop, they sailed on, so that after two years had passed, it was in the third that they rounded the Pillars of Heracles and came to Egypt. There they said (what some may believe, though I do not) that in sailing round Libya they had the sun on their right hand.<sup>12, 13</sup>

In his discussion with Olga, Probus will refer to this passage. Olga will retort: first, that Herodotus is not very trustworthy; second, that he doesn't believe this himself; third, that the story has not been confirmed by any other source; and fourth, that such a journey was unlikely to be accomplished in those days, and was anyhow not repeated in antiquity.

Probus will go on to defend his point of view arguing that, in general, Herodotus is trustworthy (this may develop into a wholly separate branch of the discussion) and that he is so in this particular case. Further he will point out that, even if Herodotus does not believe the story about the sun at the right (starboard) side of the ship, he does suppose that the circumnavigation did indeed take place,<sup>14</sup> since he uses the event as an argument for his claim that Africa is 'encompassed by the sea'. It is of course a pity, Probus will say, that no other sources remain, but many may have perished. Moreover, he will refer to experts confirming that the journey was actually feasible in those days<sup>15</sup> and that, though this feat was not repeated, there surely occurred in antiquity further Phoenician explorations of the African coast.<sup>16</sup> Finally, and this is the clinching argument, isn't the fact that they, sailing west, had the sun on their right, that is on the north side, a solid proof that they were sailing on the southern hemisphere?<sup>17</sup>

But Olga need not give in. The text, she will remark, nowhere mentions anything about 'sailing west'.<sup>18</sup> So perhaps the Phoenicians were not that far south when they had the sun on their right, and may have been sailing to the east for a stretch. Or, if they were indeed sailing to the west, they may have seen the sun sinking to the right of the bow of their ship, that is on the northwestern side, something that may very well occur in summer, without going far south.

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<sup>12</sup> This passage is found in book IV (Melpomene), chapter 42: Herodotus (1982), pp. 238-241. The map of *the world according to Herodotus*, drawn by Thecla Herschbach, has been taken from Herodotus (1995), pp. 284-5. The itinerary of the Phoenicians has been added by the present author.

<sup>13</sup> At this point Slide 9 was shown, containing the last sentence of the quotation.

<sup>14</sup> Macan (1973), Vol. I., pp. 28-29, Note 18.

<sup>15</sup> Macan (1973), Vol. I., p. 28, Note 18.

<sup>16</sup> Here Probus could cite experts mentioning the expedition of the Carthaginian dignitary Hanno, at the end of the fifth century BC. However, much remains unclear about his exploit. See Harden (1962, pp. 170-177).

<sup>17</sup> Macan, *loc. cit.*; Van Groningen (1966), p. 23.; A.D. Godley in Herodotus (1982), p.241, Note 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Pace* Aubrey de Sélincourt, who may be translating the end of the quote too freely: '...that as they sailed on a westerly course round the southern end of Libya [= Africa, EK], they had the sun on their right – to northward of them', Herodotus (1972), p. 284.

Probus, however, will object that in those cases the Phoenician observation wouldn't have been spectacular, and that for Herodotus it would not have been an issue.

So, Probus' position seems very strong. Precisely the fact that Herodotus does not believe it, he says, confirms the story. Even so, Olga cannot be convinced. After all, she maintains, even at noon the sun may be on the right (starboard) of a ship sailing west on the northern hemisphere, if only one sails south of the tropic of Cancer. There is no need then to suppose that the Phoenicians did penetrate much further. Also, it is rather odd that in connection with sowing and harvesting nowhere mention is made of the interchange of the seasons.<sup>19</sup>

There does not seem to be a winning strategy for Probus. Whereas Probus *is* indeed right (this we assumed), there seems to be no strategy that would give him a guarantee of *being judged* right. This is so, without there being any question of crackpots, and without anything being wrong with the rules of discussion, without any question of conceptual confusion, and without derailment of strategic maneuvering.

The cause is not hard to spell out: the necessary data are lacking. In fact, Probus' claim – that the circumnavigation did take place – is much too definite, even though he may be right. If he were to moderate his claim by introducing a qualifier, saying that it is 'plausible' or 'likely' that the circumnavigation took place, his possibilities to win the discussion would considerably increase. It is exactly the absence of such a link with our epistemic situation that weakens his position.

If the example we just gave is representative, we must admit that even an ideal system of rules for discussion will not bring it about that whoever is right can be judged right. At most, this will hold for situations in which all relevant data are available in principle, that is to say that they belong to the common starting points, or can be reckoned to belong to them after an investigation by a method that all parties admit. Thus the scope of the theorem that whoever is right can be judged right turns out to be subjected to substantial limitations. This evidently robs me of an illusion of my early days.

All the same, *ladies and gentlemen*, there is still a lot of work for the theory of argumentation and related disciplines. (And now I'm going to pronounce a very long sentence.) Indeed, the five objections we just discussed may also be seen as calls to heed certain research themes:<sup>20</sup> thus the first objection, the one about the crackpots, refers to research questions about the possibility of reasonable discussion between parties that are extremely far apart and therefore to questions about alleged or real incommensurability of paradigms;<sup>21</sup> the second objection, the one about the discussion of discussion rules, refers to the question of how we can have good rulings of metadiscussions and of how discussants can determine their own rules, and therefore to questions about autonomy and reasonableness;<sup>22</sup> the third objection, the one about conceptual confusion and stalemates, asks for techniques for detecting winning strategies, for avoiding conceptual confusion, and for revitalizing discussions

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<sup>19</sup> Van Groningen (1966), p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> At this point slide 10 was shown, listing the five research themes.

<sup>21</sup> Discussions between parties that are extremely far apart (*deep disagreement*) were treated enthusiastically by John Woods in his Vonhoff Lectures (Woods 2001), which have not appeared in print. See Fogelin (1985). See also, for instance, Woods (1992, 2004: Part V: *Intractable Disagreement*) and Turner & Campolo (eds.) (2005).

<sup>22</sup> See the ninth chapter, 'Equivocation', in Hamblin (1970), pp. 283-303. See also, for instance, Krabbe (2003) and Houtlosser & Van Laar (eds.) (2007).

that have got stuck, it therefore asks for logical and semantic analyses of possible discussion moves and for procedures that allow one to give clarifying reformulations of points of view and of concessions, to unmask illusory differences of opinion and illusory agreements, and to adjust the conceptual apparatus;<sup>23</sup> the fourth objection, that the willingness to admit that someone is right is lacking because the discussants act to promote their own interests, refers to research questions about the behavior of discussants, and therefore to questions about strategic maneuvering and about fallacies that originate from the derailment of strategic maneuvering, to questions also about the way in which strategic maneuvering in all kinds of institutional contexts, such as the courtroom or the parliament, takes shape or should take shape;<sup>24</sup> the fifth and last objection, finally, refers to the importance of a sufficient supply of common starting points and of the techniques to determine them, and therefore emphasizes the importance, also for the theory of argumentation, of Immanuel Kant's ancient question: What can we know?<sup>25</sup> (End of this sentence: I guess it was the longest one I ever pronounced.)

In any case, it is nice to know that we shall not run out of work. In all the areas mentioned, by the way, there is something going on, or even quite a lot. In the meantime we must learn to live with the idea that we are sometimes right without having the means to be judged right and that, even if we are right, we should not reproach our interlocutor with his or her sometimes reasonable inability to admit that we are.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Before I finish this valedictory lecture, a word of thanks.<sup>26</sup> Since I'm starting to become a bit forgetful these days, I have put the essence of this message on a slide. Now I only need to say for whom this word is meant. Let me start by saying that it is also meant for those I shall now forget to mention. It is surely meant for my dear spouse, my family and friends, for my enthusiastic colleagues at this flourishing faculty, for our inspiring students with their so successful STUFF<sup>27</sup>, for the RuG, for the CvB, for the GUF, and for the always helpful OBP, let me mention just a few names:<sup>28</sup> Gerda Bosma, Diana van Esch, Trijnie Hekman, Jorine Janssen, Gyan Otto, Anita Willemse, and Katherine Gardiner, secretary of the Examinations Committee.

<sup>23</sup> See Hamblin, *loc. cit.* See also, for instance, Walton (1996) and Van Laar ((2003).

<sup>24</sup> See Van Eemeren & Houtlosser (2002). See also, for instance, Van Eemeren & Houtlosser (eds.) (2006).

<sup>25</sup> Kant (1976), p. 728 (A: 805. B: 833). See also, for instance, Freeman (2005) and Lumer (ed.) (2005, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> At this point Slide 11 was shown, containing merely the word 'DANK' (= thanks).

<sup>27</sup> Key to the abbreviations: STUFF = *Student Association Faculty of Philosophy*; RuG = *University of Groningen*; CvB = *University Board*; GUF = *Groningen University Fund*; OBP = *secretarial and technical staff*; UCW = *University Committee on Research*; AZIS = *University Office for Academic Affairs and International Cooperation*; TF = *Department of Theoretical Philosophy*; GF = *Department of History of Philosophy*; PF = *Department of Practical Philosophy*; E = *Department of Ethics*; TAR = *Research Group Speech communication, Theory of Argumentation, and Rhetoric, Faculty of Humanities, University of Amsterdam*; KI = *Section Artificial Intelligence, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, University of Groningen*; PCCP = *Research Seminar of the Department of Theoretical Philosophy and the Department of Ethics*; FB = *Faculty Board*; ISSA = *International Society for the Study of Argumentation*; OSSA = *Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation*.

<sup>28</sup> At this point Slide 12 was shown, containing a complete telephone and address list of faculty personnel.

Finally, I wish to thank all those who have honored this meeting by their presence. Wait a moment, there is more. (Slide 11: 'DANK' reappears). I forgot to mention by name some very supportive people: Hauke de Vries, the lady who will succeed me – uhm, that is not Hauke de Vries, but Jeanne Peijnenburg – and Benno Ticheler (thanks for the scanning), as well as Jan Albert van Laar, Allard Tamminga and Barteld Kooi.

*My thanks* (Slide 13 appears, see *Figure 6*; speaker shifts to English, with Dutch names oddly pronounced) *also extend to the organizers of yesterday's and today's fine international conference on Strategies in Argumentation: Jan Albert van Laar, Allard Tamminga and Barteld Kooi, to the keynote speakers Frans van Eemeren, Douglas Walton, and John Woods, and to all other speakers and participants of that conference.*

*Finally, I wish to thank my colleagues in other faculties of this university, elsewhere in this country, elsewhere on this planet, and in the universe, as well as Theo Kuipers.*

*Now I forgot...* (Slide 11: 'DANK' reappears; speaker shifts back to Dutch). Now I forgot again to mention some very supportive people: my PhD-supervisor, Else Barth, my coauthors for a number of publications (the supports of research), the indispensable teaching assistants in logic (the supports of education), those who completed their masters, those working on a PhD, those that took a PhD, my co-teachers in a number of courses, my colleagues in the UCW and in AZIS, the colleagues of TF, of GF, of PF, and the colleagues of E (that is Ethics), and of the Examinations Committee. Oh, and most importantly the colleagues from Amsterdam, belonging to TAR (Speech communication, Theory of Argumentation, and Rhetoric: the champions of strategic maneuvering), and those of KI (Artificial Intelligence, but actually applied philosophy), and the members of our research seminar: the PCCP (it sounds like a communist party, but there one finds real discussion; so I'm glad to continue my membership); further, I want to mention our eminent FB, once more the Groningen University Fund that created this chair and agreed to continue it, and the trustees of my chair, namely Michel ter Hark, Theo Kuipers, Gerard Renardel de Lavalette and in the past also John North. Thanks also to ISSA and OSSA, and to PSH, that is Pieter Sjoerd Hasper (this year our Aristotle translation will finally appear, for which I wish to thank in advance our publisher: the *Historische Uitgeverij*), thanks to Aristotle himself, and many, many others, whose names must, unfortunately, remain unmentioned.<sup>29</sup> Thanks, thanks, thanks.

This was my valedictory. I have spoken.

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<sup>29</sup> I also want to show my appreciation to Frans van Eemeren, Scott Jacobs and John Woods, fellow-editors of the journal *Argumentation*, and especially to Peter Houtlosser and Jan Albert van Laar, guest editors and also contributing authors of a special issue of this journal (Houtlosser & Van Laar, 2007), as well as to the authors Peter McBurney, Frans van Eemeren again, Maurice Finocchiaro, Jim Mackenzie, Simon Parsons, Douglas Walton and John Woods again, who all contributed to this special issue – my appreciation of the efforts and contributions by which they realized this dialectical gem that was offered to me on the day before this valedictory was delivered. For me, this has been an extremely pleasant surprise. The more painful is the circumstance that I was unable to communicate my gratitude to my friend and colleague Peter Houtlosser, who died that very day.



The image shows the word 'THANKS!' written in a thick, red, hand-drawn style. The letters are blocky and slightly irregular, with some overlapping strokes. The exclamation point is also drawn in the same style. The background is plain white.

Figure 6 [SLIDE 13]

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