

## INADMISSIBLE ARGUMENTS

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### I. *The programme*

It is always very enticing to motivate one's ideas by showing how advantageous it would be if all the world accepted them. But such a motivation turns out to be fundamentally insufficient when other people take the negative consequences linked with them more seriously than oneself does or — even worse — consider the ideas under discussion as indeed attractive, but unrealistic. When this reproach is justified all the pretended advantages are only due to the assumption of an idealized situation and might have nothing to do with the conception itself. Such a warning is particularly important for discussions on argumentation: people willingly agree that current practices are highly unsatisfying. But given the interdependence with vital interests of individuals and communities it looks hopeless to combat these practices — especially when one realizes that there is at least a partial justification behind them and no simple criteria for their legitimacy are available. So we have to look for a more reliable starting point than judgments of what we find desirable or not.

Nevertheless we shall also discuss the practical impact of our results that we are going to justify otherwise; but only to forestall the suspicion of practical irrelevance. We are opposed to a widespread a priori belief that theoretical reliability is only possible by loss of practical significance; the sense in which this assumption is incorrect will be explained in this article. In fact there is not only a belief, but also a sort of argument that might show the impossibility of such an enterprise from the beginning: «If it is accepted that one can argue about anything, this also holds for our claims on argumentation. So one can never arrive at definitive results about argumentation.» We think this reasoning to be correct; yet it does

not show that it is irrelevant on what sort of basis justifications are given (the reasoning itself needs some presuppositions, too). But only that latter claim would render the distinction between more or less convincing (or valid) arguments useless. We do not oppose this arbitrariness thesis — that any justification can itself be called in question and so in principle every assertion is as questionable as the other — *taken in abstracto*. But we affirm that this thesis is often abused, namely to suggest that *in a given situation* (not only in abstracto) every argument is equally valid. But this would only hold if people discussed a problem under extremely weak assumptions — denying e.g. the relevance of any empirical evidence. That this is an abuse, and not only a trifling lack of precision, comes out by the fact that the arguer himself wants his addressees to draw very specific conclusions which would be unjustifiable on an abstract basis (he confuses «being on a par abstractly» and «being on a par with respect to the background on which the problem is discussed»).

So one can still look for principles as uncontroversial as possible and try to make deductions as simple as possible, expecting that the justifications thus obtained are cogent for somebody else too — without rendering illegitimate a discussion and a criticism of the basic assumptions involved in this process. Such a programme sounds (and is indeed) rather trivial. And lots of philosophical schools claim to proceed that way. But often one can easily show where these aims are not realized. This is not too astonishing since these philosophies have much more ambitious aims, say giving a basis to science, and considerations of argumentation only play a subsidiary role. So having ourselves more modest aims, we can better hope to get convincing results.

We should also mention another attitude which by completely different reasons comes to the conclusion that argumentation is not an important subject. It presupposes that there are competent men who by profound study of a field can say, which claims are more objective than others. Somebody who — for a certain domain at least — is competent should see that as many people as possible (of those concerned) accept

the view he found to be the most reliable; and since he verified the claim it suffices when people accept what he found out to be true. So the methods of propagation of these truths should primarily be chosen according to their efficiency. Apart from the question, how he can be sure of his claims, there is an embarrassing problem: under these auspices addressees are only used as objects of an indoctrination and not necessarily as intelligent subjects; but even worse: as a result of such a propaganda people might not only accept the claims proposed by the arguer but as well the inherent criteria of what is an acceptable argument. In that case one even reduces the addressee's capacity to use his own reason properly. Furthermore, an adversary may explain this use of inadmissible arguments as a proof that the claim itself is untenable. Finally practice shows often enough that such a mentality only encourages to present something as established that has not even been proved according to the arguer's own standards.

## II. *On the concept of argumentation and its implications*

So far we have only explained that certain objections do not affect our programme. But nothing has been said about which principles we want to start with. First of all we have as a matter of fact that (some) people argue in private and/or public life and that they make at least a conceptual difference between argumentation on the one hand and a mere assertion or a command on the other. Common to these three concepts is that an individual (in a very formal sense, let us call him the author) wants to influence an addressee's attitude. But the former differs from the two others in that not only the claim is formulated but something is said to support it. So the minimum that we can draw from this opposition is the difference between a claim and its support. Now giving a support would not make sense if the author's demand would automatically be followed; so it is assumed that the addressee might conduct differently; and the support is the means that

should make him adopt the attitude wanted. Still we have to specify the sort of support; for also a command can be supported e.g. by a threat of punishment in case of non-obedience. The difference is rather subtle. For «If you do not do this or that I will punish you» cannot only be used as support of an order but as well as an argument. Still there is a difference between these two uses: In the first case punishment serves as a means to make respect the author's request. But in the second case the principal subject is the addressee's interest; following the order is not motivated as an obedience to some authority but the only means the addressee can apply to avoid some disadvantages; irrespective whether the aim of the order is itself acceptable for him or not: he is confronted with a reason that might already make him accept the claim. It would be interesting to discuss this example further to see, what sort of equilibrium is thus established between the author and the addressee despite the difference in power. But we were only looking for a closer characterization of the support that is given to a claim by an argument. In this example we see that the claim is presented to the addressee's judgement to make him recognize himself that he should consent. This characteristic comes out to be essential for argumentation in general when one considers the difference between argumentation and instruction; the latter also appeals to the addressee's intellect, but needs only to present *what* is to be accepted, not *why* it is to. Still this does not suffice to distinguish argumentation from persuasion. By its ethymological origin the latin word «persuadere» can be interpreted as «rendering something sweet, acceptable»; but in argumentation acceptance is pretended not only to rely on the convenience for the addressee, but on the fact that its appropriateness has been explained to the addressee; arguing for a claim does not mean to show how well it fits to the addressee's interests but to give reasons why it *has to* be accepted.

We have thus defined three elements of argumentation: an arguer with a claim he wants to be accepted, an addressee that may or may not accept this claim, and a support which makes the addressee *know why* he *has to* accept the claim.

Now, properties obtained by conceptual distinctions are not necessarily relevant for argumentation as an empirical phenomenon too; especially the third one looks rather dubious. But as far as *pretensions* are concerned we hold this element to be characteristic also for argumentation in normal life. There is a wide-spread (at least verbal) enthusiasm for «reasonable» and «solid» argumentation as opposed to dogmatism or prophecy; there are even institutional constraints that render appropriate justification a permanent charge. As for the accomplishment of these pretensions, we could only give polemical comments. But even this subject is often explicitly *discussed* when an opponent wants to show that his adversary has not given an acceptable argument.

So, as far as pretensions are concerned, we have not introduced a new element to the everyday notion of argumentation. We shall take these elements as basic requests for argumentation, analyze systematically their implications and thus try to find out some proposals for a more satisfying practice. These proposals cannot be considered as results of deduction that pretend to be acceptable for everybody; but as patterns of reasoning that facilitate reflection in a specific situation and anticipate justifications whose appropriateness yet has to be verified each time again.

There is some paradox in our development of the concept of argumentation: On the one hand the addressee seems to be free to accept or refuse the claim, on the other reasons are given showing that he *must* accept it. So the original presupposition of freedom is just refuted in the argument. This paradox seems to be dissolved by the remark that the freedom is only conditional — as long as no justification for a restriction has been given. Yet this is no way out. For why should this justification be accepted? If this *regressus in infinitum* is avoided by the postulate that final justifications need not themselves be justified one can object that under this condition to any claim a suitable justification can be found that shows its acceptance to be obligatory.

From this well-known dilemma we conclude that the search for an ultimate justificatoin necessarily fails. Thus the ques-

tion, *whether* some claim has been justified has no clear sense, and must be replaced by the question, *how* or under what assumptions this claim has been justified. So whenever one of the assumptions is called in question, the claim's justification is also. And whenever the claim is used as part of another justification one has to check whether the application then made is indeed legitimated by the claim's own justification. So the necessity turns out to keep in mind not only the claim but also on what its justification depends. If you denote by the *justification index* of a claim the totality of information on the presuppositions and limitations involved in justifications that have been given for it, we can shortly express the above requirement by saying that every use of a claim (in argumentation) has to take into account the provisos that are contained in the justification index.

Now the impossibility to establish positively ultimate justifications does not imply that anything can be chosen as a justificational basis. For at least what is incompatible with the tasks of justifications must be excluded: so principles that allow arbitrariness or remove the difference between the claim to be justified and the means employed towards this aim or alter the claim to be proved, are inadmissible. This enumeration of exclusion criteria looks itself a bit arbitrary and is in fact primarily inspired by analysis of typical mistakes in argumentation; but they only render explicit some necessary conditions for justification. This is perhaps not so evident for nonarbitrariness; but if justification should restrict a domain of alternatives it cannot be based on a principle that just allows arbitrary conclusions.

We have thus started to state principles that result from our concept of argumentation. To do this in a more systematic way let us first provide a terminological explanation. Let an argument be given in the form « $A_1, \dots, A_n$ ; so  $B$ ». A *justification principle underlying* this argument is a statement of the form «if claims of types  $T_1, \dots, T_n$  are acceptable, so is a claim of type  $T$ », where  $A_1$  is of type  $T_1, \dots, A_n$  of type  $T_n$  and  $B$  of type  $T$ . Let us elucidate by taking the following example: «If all people acted like you, there would be a chaos. So you have

to change your conduct». From this we could abstract as justification principle «if a general adoption of a certain behaviour would have unacceptable consequences everybody has to give up this behaviour» or «anything that may end in a chaos is forbidden». Such a justification principle is a necessary link between assumptions that may pass as acceptable and the claim to be established. In contrast to wide-spread opinions we assert that current argumentation does not only suffer from imperfect applications of sound principles but as well (and probably even more) from mistaken principles that look at first sight reasonable but turn out to be catastrophic by a closer analysis. Principles that legitimate abuses are in many respects more dangerous than abuses themselves, because they prevent us from recognizing that something is wrong and exclude thus any consideration of what has to be altered. So it looks recommendable to look at justification principles more closely.

Certain logical laws surely belong to the least questionable principles; but they also turn out to be too general and too cumbersome for everyday argumentation. So to get closer to practice we do not try to increase the list of *valid* justification principles, but to give criteria that allow to recognise *invalidity*. Of these criteria we want to strengthen the above mentioned aspect of non-arbitrariness to the following *generalizability condition*: A justification principle must always apply. Or: A justification principle that may allow inadmissible conclusions (in at least some possible situation) is inadmissible itself.

So for excluding a justification principle it already suffices to *construct* a situation where its application would be unacceptable. This does not necessarily imply that a claim — originally motivated with the help of such a principle — cannot be held; often a restriction of this principle may still be strong enough to establish the claim. But to prevent introducing inadmissible principles one has to demand the effort of reconsideration; for only that way a rigorous control and avoidance of certain abuses described below is possible. The generalizability condition is derived as follows: A justification



principle that does not satisfy this condition justifies in a certain situation a conclusion that by stronger reasons of another kind is unacceptable. So these principles taken together contradict the non-arbitrariness condition, and since the other reasons are supposed to be more reliable it is the former principle that has to be given up.

The generalizability condition has not only its abstract deduction but also its motivation by concrete observations. Firstly when gaps turn out in an argument people like to fill them out by introducing ad hoc some general claim that looks at first rather convincing. The generalizability condition reminds that such an attractiveness is not sufficient for dealing with general statements. Secondly when in a discussion irrefutable counterarguments are given to a general thesis, its author readily admits that he has to exclude these «unreasonable» applications. Yet only a clear reformulation of the principle he relies on allows us to see whether under these restrictions he has a more acceptable basis which is still strong enough to justify his claim. Finally a clearer consciousness of this condition should prevent enervating discussions that normally arise when one interlocutor does not accept the application of a principle he used himself before. The knowledge that his own claim is thus suspended should make him recognize that he either has to justify his claim differently or must accept the other's argument too. These requirements on justification principles concern the third element in our description of the concept of argument. We shall give conditions for the arguer and the addressee as well.

We have already mentioned the paradox of the addressee who on the one hand is the arbitrator but on the other as a result of argumentation *has to* accept certain claims. This analysis leads to two postulates: (*Autonomy of the addressee*) An addressee cannot accept a claim as justified if the justification contains a notion he does not understand or relies on principles or assumptions that are not already acceptable to him. (*Active openness*) What is made knowable to an addressee can claim to be recognized as such.

Whenever the autonomy principle is violated one essential



condition of argumentation is not satisfied, namely that the addressee recognizes (by the argument) the claim as valid. The second principle is just the hypothesis under which the arguer acts; and he can start from such an assumption since the claim is to come out as something that the addressee accepts as a result of his own reasoning. The existence of certain convictions on the addressee's part is not an argument against the principle, since an anterior justification may be overruled by an argument that relies on even more convincing assumptions.

Thus for an argumentation to be acceptable it does not suffice that it is valid according to established standards of the domain one talks about, but it has also to be accessible to the addressee; otherwise there may be persuasion or instruction in a thesis that is right, but for the addressee it only means the demand of consent on the basis of motivations he cannot sufficiently control. Stressing this point is not only motivated by the desire of terminological rigour, but is intended to render evident a mistake current in argumentation. Whenever an arguer links his request for the arguer's consent or adherence with sort of an argument which is not sufficiently evident to the addressee, he only conceals that he finally only invokes some authority. The autonomy principle should make clear that, as argumentation is intended to convince a person, it has to start from a basis that is accessible to him; thus argumentation is generally much harder than giving a proof in a domain where the admissible verification methods are relatively clear. So the question of what the addressee can accept, is not just a sort of courtesy of the arguer but is an essential condition for argumentation. Furthermore, any sort of pressure — e.g. suggesting that the addressee must consent if he wants to pass for competent or bright — simply would finish argumentation, since argumentation poses much stronger conditions than only the final acceptance of the claims. So an ideal addressee for argumentation is just a perfect antiauthoritarian.

One really has to stress this simple requirement of argumentation. For it brings out the absurdity of certain phenomena. For instance addressees having guilt feelings because they could not follow an argument or ridiculing themselves by de-

fending an argument they have not clearly understood themselves. On the other hand arguers who do not perceive that new work has to be done if their argument is based on a principle the addressee rejects and repeat their deduction while the disagreement does not at all concern the correctness of their inference steps. Or still worse — arguers intimidating the addressee in a more or less subtle way, but nevertheless pretending to give solid arguments or «concluding» when they even did not say from what they drew their conclusions. Finally a cheap criticism that somebody did not prove his claim linked with the refusal of any serious effort to get acquainted with the prerequisites of his considerations.

The severe requirements that argumentation poses forces to reflect on what role it can actually play in everyday discourses. Already for reasons of time other forms of teaching or even propaganda may turn out to be indispensable. But concealing this necessity, yet not acting according to one's own pretensions, only allows abuses. (Nevertheless in a given situation the question whether a certain subject has to be treated by way of argumentation, can itself be made subject of argumentation).

The postulate of «active openness» just can prevent that the autonomy principle is used to render oneself immune against argumentation. Some people indeed prefer to be confronted with mere confessions of belief or even polemical attacks against themselves; for one can always restrict oneself to answer that evidently fundamental disagreements exist. Argumentation, in contrast, wants to change attitudes and because it refers to the addressee's own standards, one cannot withdraw simply by help of the above remark. Nevertheless the practical consequences can only be of a kind that does not render the autonomy principle vacuous. This requirement is satisfied when the addressee is only obliged to explain *what* in the argument is not accessible or acceptable to him or even more generally why he cannot adopt it. But this already implies the possibility that the objections can be removed and thus finally the claim will become acceptable.

Finally on the arguer's part the fundamental requirement can

be formulated as a sort of «*golden rule of argumentation*»: «Whatever you use as an argument has to be acceptable to yourself; but furthermore you must be able to assume that it would be acceptable to you if you were in the addressee's situation».

The second part is just a consequence of the autonomy principle. The first is a straightforward consequence of the aim of an argument: if the argument is to show that some claim is justified it cannot do so when relying on assumptions that already the arguer does not accept. In addition we have already given a more concrete argument why the employment of dubious means in argumentation is questionable. This principle restricts considerably what is to be called a legitimate argument. For starting from the addressee's opinions (that I do not accept myself) and deducing a certain claim (that I also accept) is not admitted — even if the deduction is correct and making it acceptable already demands an enormous argumentatorial effort. Nevertheless, the consequences are not so extreme as one might expect. For one should distinguish between *proving that* some claim is a consequence of a certain assumption and presenting it as *acceptable because* it is provable in this way, it is only the latter that is declared incompatible with argumentation (provided the assumptions are not valid for the arguer). And this requirement has also some support by certain experiences: addressees tend to consider themselves as abused like toys if an arguer first justifies a claim on the basis of their assumptions but later on rejects some of them. So it is useful to make a difference between what has been proved (i.e. that certain assumptions have certain consequences) and what has been justified (i.e. that these consequences have to be accepted).

This discussion induces us to add a distinction which is not based on conceptual analysis but turns out to be a very efficient means to prevent abuses of arguments: *the distinction between what has been established and the consequences that are drawn*. When a public prosecutor in his pleading exposes all the observations that show the defendant's wickedness and then concludes that he is guilty of murder, he has indeed prov-

ed something but his conclusion remains unjustified. Such a hasty transition from some detailed argument to a somewhat different conclusion is very typical for current argumentation. This renders particular attention necessary since often nothing essential is said in the preceding argument (it concerns for instance proofs of facts that are not doubted) and it is only the passage to the conclusion which is essential. The above distinction thus allows a preliminary decision whether the preceding argumentation, even if supposed to be correct, suffices to establish the main claim.

This finishes the exposition of the general principles of argumentation. These principles give some basic *orientation*, *not rules* of action for somebody who is concerned with arguments. We have several reasons to make these principles explicit despite their triviality: First of all to prevent the permanent abuses that come from linking the strong pretensions of argumentation with a liberalism in the concept of argument which can never guarantee the fulfillment of these pretensions. Secondly to give a clear idea of how argumentation can be understood and thus oppose to the tendency which takes existing practice simply as a standard. Thirdly only a clear-cut preliminary knowledge of requirements of argumentation can be expected to influence a person in a situation where much more immediate and viable interests are (or seem to be) in question. Finally we oppose these principles to various conceptions or fragmentary ideas that presuppose or conclude overhastily that there are no non-arbitrary standards to judge arguments and thus even encourage misuses of argumentation. The third reason indicates that we are not confronted with a temporary phenomenon but a permanent temptation which is not appropriately treated neither by mere description nor simply by some well-intentioned prescriptions for practice.

### III. *Mistaken justification principles*

We next present typical mistaken justification principles. Here we are only interested in such mistakes that can be re-

cognized *without* specific knowledge of facts. It will turn out that many common arguments rely on such principles. This is not astonishing since the propensity to discuss problems without specific knowledge of the domain they belong to, compels us to rely on rather general claims where everybody can consider himself competent and — stressing his liberty of choice of principles — also irrefutable. Applying our criticism on concretely given arguments often just uncovers what has to be proved additionally before the claim can be considered to be established.

We do not and cannot claim that our criticism gives mechanical rules to declare certain arguments illegitimate. On the one hand we have already discussed that different justification principles can be abstracted from the same argument; on the other hand our criticism itself is often based on conditions whose verification in a given situation requires additional non-trivial considerations. So we just give an exposition of certain conceptual tools that may facilitate and accelerate the critical comprehension of given arguments.

Note that we do not classify *arguments* but *mistakes* — so that the same argument may well contain different mistakes. By reasons of space our discussion will be rather fragmentary; it only wants to give an idea of how the analysis can be carried out.

- (1) *Immunization* consists in suggesting that an argument need not even be discussed by reasons which do not take into account the contents of this argument.

Its illegitimacy is evident since it would allow to exclude even the most reliable proof from being seriously considered. It should clearly be distinguished from pragmatic justifications e.g. lack of time; for by the latter the question of validity remains in suspense while in the former case an — unjustified — judgement of the argument itself is implied. A particularly malicious argument consists to answer a criticism in the following way: «We already know that world is not perfect; yet we always admire people who are scandalized at this situation and who do not want to tolerate it».

Here the speaker seems to have done all justice to the

critic and has even expressed a sort of veneration for his personality and considers himself completely justified to leave the subject. Yet it remains undiscussed whether the criticism concerns only unavoidable deficiencies of the world or mistakes that are corrigible and for which certain persons or organisational principles may definitely be rendered responsible. — Another form that from the logical point of view is particularly devious, but is nevertheless permanently used, consists in concluding just from the arguer's claim, that he is not to be taken seriously — before having considered the tenability of his argument and the sort of reasoning it employs. — Eliminating immunization increases the amount of arguments one has to take into account. If exterior reasons necessitate a restriction this should not be confused with a *refutation* of the argument. Furthermore, given the possibility that one can withdraw from embarrassing, yet striking, arguments one must demand that even pragmatic selection principles have to be arranged in a way that minimizes this risk. One might suspect that the distinction between these reasons of elimination is irrelevant for practice; but this is false: when for a decision to be appropriate a *complete* knowledge of the pertinent alternatives is necessary this necessity would easily prevail other pragmatic arguments, but could not induce to reconsider a conception that one *knows* to be false.

- (2) *Petitio principii* («begging the question») means that the argument presupposes already what has to be shown, and thus removes the difference between the claim to be justified and the support of this claim.

So, one might object, every justification of a theory by its explanatory force is forbidden. This is partially a misunderstanding of our criticism; for arguing for the *acceptance* of a theory by showing how well it explains phenomena is not excluded. But this argument only establishes the usefulness of a theory for certain purposes, and does *not* imply that any consequence of the theory or any assumption that can be shown to be necessary for its *validity* is thus also acceptable. So in fact usefulness, but not validity, can be justified with the explanatory force of a theory.

There is an inexhaustible variety of forms to beg the question — reaching from simple repetition to very sophisticated deductions. Sometimes it is already hidden in the use of the concepts that appear in the argument. One often answers a criticism which stresses that certain things must be changed with the assertion that reality shows this to be impossible; to support this claim one enumerates a lot of facts which only show that the critic's ideas are not realized actually. Then this is either a mere repetition of what the critic himself presupposes (one cannot demand a change towards something which already exists) or the counterargument is intended to show that reality cannot change in the way the critic wants. But as long as one does not explain how certain factors *show* such a change to be impossible or highly improbable, one only repeats the assertion. This method is very attractive because one opposes facts to a criticism that is based on wishes — while an appropriate counterargument has to be based on general statements or a certain interpretation of reality and thus on a much less controversial sort of reasoning. It is by the way a current phenomenon in argumentation that arguers try to start their arguments on a basis that is particularly favourable to them — but unfortunately missing the point of the problem discussed. This is just one form of the next class of mistakes:

- (3) By «*shifting*» we mean either averting from an argument without sufficient justification or linking justifications of different claims in an inappropriate manner.

This description does not explain *what* the mistake is but only denotes a schema under which all these mistakes, but not only mistakes, are subsumable. This suggests that «*shifting*» rather denotes an oratorical trick but a character of justification principles. Nevertheless, there are a lot of shifts whose attractiveness just results from the concepts involved so that we have to mention it in our catalogue.

Typical is the shift between principles and facts and vice versa: If somebody attacks an action of some member of an institution one interprets this as an attack against the insti-



tution itself or even the principles on which it is based. This can also be regarded as a *pars-pro-toto*-consideration.

The next example just shows the inversion: taking the part for the whole. In a lecture in Heidelberg an English philosopher criticized an argument about free will as follows: This argument involves some modal notions; now modal logic has turned out to be dubious in some respects (he explained which); so this argument is dubious, too. (But it was not at all clear whether the sort of criticism against modal logic in general would also strike the use of modal terms in the criticized argument). — Finally we mention the unjustified link of two problems: e.g. asking a precise definition of «justice» before one can ask whether a certain decision of a court was just or not (which may be necessary if the case is rather ambiguous but superfluous if already some fundamental requirements of justice are clearly violated).

- (4) By «*formal mistakes*» we mean the application of formal schemata in a case where they are inapplicable.

There are inference schemata that are not logically valid. Some of them are used simply because people consider them erroneously as «logical», most of them just hold under an additional assumption — which in illegitimate applications either does not hold or is at least itself controversial. Many of these assumptions are expressible in the form that two notions describe a complete alternative; e.g. refuted-true; for-against. One relies e.g. on such an assumption when one concludes the truth of a thesis from the fact that its refutation failed, or interprets criticism of an argument as an opposition against the principle the argument is to establish.

- (5) We speak of a «*conceptual mistake*» when a concept is used in a way that is incompatible with its content or rôle.

A trivial but nevertheless current mistake of that sort is to contradict a single empirical statement with a general empirical assertion: «we know that this did not happen since we have only trustworthy civil servants». Just the slightest reflections on the possibilities how to prove these two claims would reveal that such an argument — normally — is untenable. For anyway the second statement relies on a progn-

sis while in the first case a verification of what happened is needed. Such a reflection on verification methods also allows to reveal an abuse of *value judgements* that are presented as «proved» (just like facts); this confusion is sometimes linked with qualifying as incompetent those who contest this appreciation (thus pretending that established and unquestionable standards exist in the field the discussion is about). An important subject is the relation between a principle and its realization; there are arguments which tend to identify these two or make a use of the latter that is incompatible with the former. We cannot go into details here, but only mention the general principle behind our analysis, namely any measure that contradicts a purpose it is supposed to serve or another aim that has a priority before the former, is inadmissible (yet not any measure that does not fulfill its original purpose is by this alone unjustified).

This exposition — though fragmentary and inconclusive — should show that

- mistaken arguments often result not from wrong applications of sound principles, but from wrong principles;
- wrongness of these principles is recognizable by rather simple logical considerations;
- mistakes often arise because one uses general statements without taking seriously into account the implications of such generality — thus having in mind a legitimate domain of application but using the principle outside this domain.

Now if the seduction of certain arguments comes from the attractiveness of such principles their refutation has to answer on the same level. Moral appeals evidently are not an appropriate answer when everybody considers himself right; and refuting an argument by showing the claim to be false is often impossible (at least much more difficult than showing the mistakenness of the principle involved) — in particular when the discussion is not about simple facts. Again such requirements are already articulated in everyday-argumentation; but one considers them seriously only when it serves the own pur-

poses and otherwise easily qualifies them as futile purism. So a clear-cut formulation of what is inadmissible is just supposed to promote a more coherent and unbiased use (i.e. a use that makes no exceptions) of this criticism. Note that our demands are not comparable to what logic normally requires: namely to present an argument in a certain *form* to guarantee its validity. For we only exclude what can be recognized to be invalid and thus incompatible with the argument's pretensions.

#### IV. *Concluding comments*

The ideas developed in this article start from a radical distinction between the acceptability of an argument and the validity of the claim to be established; this means in particular the well-known, but permanently neglected observation that correctness of an argument is not guaranteed by the validity of its result. Logical deduction can be used to derive results from *any* assumptions; nevertheless one can distinguish correct from incorrect deductions — by examining whether the inferences are correct or not. Analogous questions can also be considered for argumentation; though one has to be much more cautious at least some *incorrectness* criteria can be obtained. Our criteria are formal — mainly relying on incompatibility considerations, but informal in the sense that the conditions involved concern the *use* that is made of an argument. The formality of these principles is supposed to guarantee non-arbitrariness (which is not the same as being independent of any assumption). Yet we hope them to be still informative enough to serve as a means of orientation in everyday discourse.

Our proposal does not consist in developing argumentation as an extended form of deduction. This can already be seen from our description of the addressee's role. Furthermore our analysis of arguments is not supposed to rule out claims, but to

figure out *in what sense* they have been established. A more detailed exposition of possible *aims of an argument* would render this clearer; we can only give some catchwords here: showing that a given justification is incomplete (instead of stating that it is irreparably wrong) — stressing that a certain alternative has to be taken into account (without claiming that the result then will necessarily come out to be different) — demanding to consider in advance the consequences of a decision (without rejecting the decision itself) — reminding that a certain thesis often has been abused (not to discard the thesis, but to urge the necessity of careful application) — showing that a certain idea is less crazy than it first sounds (without expecting it to be accepted). So our inadmissibility criteria are not primarily supposed to rule out ideas but to make their interdependencies clearer. This, by the way, does not come out as a result of enthusiasm for deliberation and permanent scepticism but by *proving* deficiencies.

To prevent misunderstandings we should mention that we do not consider other concepts of argumentation as mistaken when they start from a more liberal definition of «argument» which is more directly inspired by a description of existing practice. Our criticism of current arguments in fact already presupposes that it is actually used in a wider sense. Only if the treatment of (in)validity questions is declared unfeasible or practically irrelevant we shall oppose — as long as no cogent argument is given. — Nevertheless the considerations developed here do not automatically provide useful rules for acting in oral discussion; for then not only logical, but also empirical factors have to be taken into account. So an attempt in this direction has to be preceded by empirical work.

This enquiry is motivated by experiences showing that often much energy is needed to make *applications* of the trivial principles explained above, respectively the reasons they are based on, accepted; this reluctance often only results from the fear that in accepting such an argument one already makes irrevocable commitments. Systematic exposition makes clear that these commitments are much weaker and less partial than people mostly expect. Finally the author cannot accept what

current argumentation methods often imply: that better solutions, striking rejections, or relevant contributions are rejected *not* because they are inaccessible to the addressees, *but* because misleading arguments prevent the addressees from considering them seriously.

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