The article addresses the problem of eristic and its modern conceptualizations. The author juxtaposes the concepts of Aristotle, Schopenhauer and Kotarbiński pointing to differences in their approaches to the art of dispute. The outcome indicates that there should be a distinction between eristic in the classical sense and in the sense of a new eristic. A new approach to eristic would correspond to the area of rhetoric which Wayne Booth calls Win-Rhetoric. The perspective different from Aristotle’s is also developed by some Russian authors (Roždestvenskij, Blažević, Selivanov). The author argues that the interpreter’s unambiguous declaration of adopting one of the two concepts of eristic is a prerequisite for a more adequate analysis of its manifestations (argumentative strategies and problems in the sphere of ethics) in communicative interactions.

Key words: eristic, Aristotle, Kotarbiński, Schopenhauer, Win-Rhetoric

Introduction

The rhetoric of dispute may be considered at several levels of communication: public (political disputes), professional (business and trade negotiations, mediation), and private (disputes with family or neighbours). Dispute may also be regarded through the lens of specific modes and purposes of communication: the rules of argumentation, persuasion and manipulation. Finally, the proceedings of dispute will vary depending on the choice of the argumentative “methodology” relevant to the objectives set by the participants. These objectives generally stem from a rhetorical situation. Methodology will therefore involve either dialectic or rhetoric or eristic. The objectives of the participants depend on whether dispute is carried out in public and thus is designed for a specific audience or if it takes place in a private space where the participants simultaneously serve as auditoriums. This in turn has an influence both on the hierarchy of participants’ objectives and on the choice of a rhetorical genre.
In this article dispute is discussed from the perspective of eristic due to eristic’s primary focus on dispute and the narrowest range of dispute-specific methodological tools. By contrast, dialectic and rhetoric encompass broader spheres of communication (research investigation, discussion, negotiation, persuasive dialogue, conversation, etc.) and they both recognize the types of interactions other than dispute. To illustrate the complexity of the problem, let us formulate several important (rhetorical) questions:

What is eristic? What is its relationship with the techniques of communication? Is eristic a mere collection of argumentative fraud, tricks, errors and fallacies? (This would be the understanding according to the neo-Aristotelian tradition). Or is it the strategy of dispute – as some modern scholars claim – structuring the methodology of argument use? Is naming dispute “eristic” derogative? If so, what are the criteria? Do the arguments used in the dispute become eristic because of the intentionality of their use? When can someone’s behavior and argument be called eristic? Is it when they are based on the assumption of victory in dispute? Or is it rather when the participant(s) use arguments commonly regarded as fallacious? And if participants do rely on the assumptions of victory but do not use the arguments referred to as fallacious – can we still call their argumentation eristic? Does the frequency of using fallacies in dispute play a role in regarding someone’s argument as eristic? If so, what should be the balance between logically efficient and flawed reasoning to consider it eristic? Is the quality of fallacies important to label someone’s argument eristic?

A separate list of questions could apply to the nature of relationships between rhetoric, dialectic and eristic: Is eristic a component of both rhetoric and dialectic? For, after all, a rhetorical stasis theory provides for the construction and the analysis of dispute (whereas dispute itself is regarded as eristic phenomenon). Moreover, rhetorical argumentation includes refutation techniques found in the collections of fallacies. The resources of rhetorical elocutio have potential for stirring up emotions which are most desirable in waging disputes. Or perhaps eristic is a degenerate component of both disciplines?

Formulating these questions shall serve our reflection on the essence of what we call eristic and eristicity. Given the current state of knowledge/current concepts of eristic, providing a list of consistent answers may prove to be particularly difficult. There is a need, however, for a clear distinction of the two ways in which eristic is defined today: classical (Aristotle) and new, modified, political and public. This does not mean that I accept the existence of two eristics.
I merely point out the fact that when critics interpret something as eristic they rely on one of the two types discussed below in detail. It needs to be emphasized that this division is neither historical, nor visible in all encounters and research communities. Certainly, a new perspective on the issue of eristic can be identified both in Polish and Russian research on argumentation in communication.

Classical eristic

The first definition that I quote comes from *A History of Ancient Philosophy* by Giovanni Reale. By presenting and interpreting the concepts of ancient philosophers, the author adapts their ideas to the field of contemporary discourse: “Eristic – a term derived from the word ἐρίζω, which means: I fight. It is the art of fighting with words in which you always defeat your opponent in the discussion (Reale 2008: 77). In this definition there are two important distinctions: First, concerning the interactive situation – “the art of fighting” – and second, concerning the goal – to “defeat your opponent.” The essence of eristic lies in its usability and the arguments in dispute should be interpreted metaphorically as the blows inflicted on the opponent. Forcing our rival to surrender gives us the emotional and intellectual advantage which in the end should make him admit his defeat. This is the classical concept of eristic emerging from the interpretation proposed by Reale.

What should be emphasized is that eristic was not imbued with negative meaning from the outset. These were the Sophists who earned it bad reputation. The classic understanding of eristic places it in the domain of agonistic ethics. In the texts on rhetoric, eristic is defined as arguing in a debate with the intention of winning at all costs (Poulakos 2006). In the dialogue *Euthydemus* Plato features the Sophists who show off their eristic tricks. It is worth noting that Plato’s examples depict a kind of argumentative practice which is more like a research dialogue (interview). Participants in the dialogue occupy unequal positions. In most interactions these are the Sophists who primarily ask questions using peirastic methods and force their adversary to surrender. However, both the participants and the audience are well aware that the so-called “victory” is realized in purely aesthetic and ritual dimension. The dialogue is more like a game of noughts and crosses, in which a more skillful player takes over a critical field and forces the opponent to admit defeat. The argumentative games of the Sophists have no deliberative dimension, and therefore do not apply to any
actual or alleged problems. They find their realization mainly in epideictic rhetoric where the primary objective of the Sophists is self-promotion.

Plato finds eristic harmful since it compels the interlocutor to accept the argument. Eristic is different from rhetoric because eristic does not convince us with the attractiveness of its argument, but instead it forces us to accept it, regardless of whether we consider it to be acceptable or not. For those who practice eristic it does not matter whether the argument is fallacious since their primary goal is to make sure that the opponent would not be able to refute it (Powell 1997: 585). Indeed this way of understanding eristic seems to be a distortion of dialectic. In *Meno* Plato distinguishes proper dialectic performed by friends and eristic practiced by opponents (*Meno* 75 c). Whereas dialectic is a joint investigation into the truth, eristic aims at the mutual destruction of positions in the dialogue.

Another argument discrediting eristic in the discussion suggests creating the impression of agreement or disagreement at the level of words, rather than at the level of substance which is being considered (Benson 2000: 87). In eristic it is appropriate for the questioner to apply every trick he can think of. Thus he can speak fast, hoping that his interlocutor will not have time to realize the fraud. He can force his opponent to give answers instantly without prior consideration. He can also resort to ridicule, pressure, or ambiguity.

In Plato’s dialogues, both Socrates and the Sophists apply the method of refutation called *elenchos* which prompts the discussion partner to reject his previously established position. Socrates and the Sophists confound their interlocutors, but the confusion they create produces quite different effects. Whereas Socrates leads his interlocutors to a deeper awareness of the limits of their knowledge and consequently inspires them to expand intellectual horizons, the Sophists turn the interlocutors’ confusion into helplessness associated with deficiencies in the art of argumentation (Benson 2000: 90).

Aristotle’s approach to argumentation is more systematic. In the treatise *On Sophistical Refutations* he separates arguments corresponding to respective methods of reasoning: logic, dialectic, eristic and sophistry (Wolf 2009). Eristic is juxtaposed with sophistry and dialectic. Aristotle claims that eristic is a dishonest form of verbal fight in a discussion (*On Sophistical Refutations* 171b 23nn) and “[t]he contentious argument stands in somewhat the same relation to the dialectical as the drawer of false diagrams to the geometrician” (*On Sophistical Refutations* 171b35).

Aristotle distinguishes fallacies which are either dependent or independent of the language:
The same fallacy can be either sophistical or eristic depending on the situational and teleological circumstances:

Those, then, who do this in order to win the mere victory are generally considered to be contentious and quarrelsome persons, while those who do it to win a reputation with a view to making money are sophistical. For the art of sophistry is, as we said, ‘a kind of art of money-making from a merely apparent wisdom, and this is why they aim at a merely apparent demonstration: and quarrelsome persons and sophists both employ the same arguments, but not with the same motives: and the same argument will be sophistical and contentious, but not in the same respect; rather, it will be contentious in so far as its aim is an apparent victory, while in so far as its aim is an apparent wisdom, it will be sophistical: for the art of sophistry is a certain appearance of wisdom without the reality (On Sophistical Refutations 171b).

Coli proposes a diagnosis on the popularity of this type of reasoning, claiming that in the 5th century BC the language of dialectic broke out of its isolation in order to reach a wide audience. Thus, dialectic replaced subtle Eleatic dialogues. Popularized by Gorgias – the master of dialectic and one of the founders of rhetoric – this approach transformed the dialectical language for use by the public (Colli 1991: 90-93). As Colli (1991: 91-92) further explains:

In the case of dialectic the victory occurs when the debate is being properly developed by subsequent replies of the opponent, which in the end gets confirmed by the debate’s outcome; in the case of rhetoric nothing in the performance of the orator can clearly predict its favorable course. In contrast to dialectical struggle, emotional factor (the impact on the audience) must be taken into account in order to win. Emotions subdue the audience to the speaker and secure his victory. Whereas dialectic competes for wisdom, rhetoric competes for wisdom oriented towards full control of the audience.

The philosophers from the Megarian school are regarded as heirs of eristic practices characterized by Plato in Euthydemus. Their method was vividly described by Teodor Gomperz:
If the great philosophies of Athens were compared to victorious army, the Megarians would be the riflemen, who never cease to provoke the rear guard and constantly disturb their march ahead. The search for inconsistencies in Athenian philosophical constructs and penetrating critique of dogmatic schools – from Aristotle to the Stoic and the Epicurean – that is what thinkers of Megara were always willing and ready to do (qtd in. Reale 2004, vol. 3: 83).

Eristic did not have a good reputation in ancient times. Thus the great rhetors who participated in political disputes must have seen the streak of destruction in the inner imperative of the speaker who pushed towards victory. Demosthenes claimed that the main threat to democracy, equality, freedom and security derives from agonistic desire of a powerful individual to demonstrate their superiority over others in every sphere of life – not only in private relationships, but in the public sphere as well (Yun Lee Too 2001: 200). This does not change the fact that the practice of agon in various spheres of life: in sport, politics, court, theater and state celebrations, was a popular form of participation in public life (Kocur 2001: 162). And where the competition took the form of a verbal dispute there was a temptation to delve into the reservoir of proven and dependable eristic methods.

Contemporary eristic

Eristic in the classical sense as illustrated by Plato in Euthydemus cannot under any circumstances be used or useful in today’s public disputes. This does not result solely from eristic’s ethical aspect, but mostly from the ineffectiveness of such practices in the sphere of policy, deliberation, and, on the whole, in relation to reality. The reality is to be the object of transformation and not of the verbal disputes.

The reemergence of eristic begins with Schopenhauer’s intuition (it shall not be called a systematic study) expressed in a short treatise The Art of Controversy, which in Poland has gained much popularity (several editions since 1973). For Schopenhauer dialectic exhibits eristic dimensions. A mere intention to be right in a dispute calls for the eristic method. What he calls “eristic dialectic” is the art of discussion in which a semblance of reason is maintained, that is per fas et nefas (with honest and dishonest methods).

Schopenhauer adapts the Aristotelian division of proofs into ethos, logos and pathos to the domain of eristic dialectic. Yet he places them in a situation of dispute and conflict between the parties competing for the approval of the
audience. As it is characteristic of the whole treatise, this division is also unsystematic, hence the suggestions for its adoption is purely interpretive. Schopenhauer (2009: 10) writes in the introduction:

Our opponent has stated a thesis, or we ourselves,—it is all one. There are two modes of refuting it, and two courses that we may pursue. I. The modes are (1) *ad rem*, (2) *ad hominem* or *ex concessis*. That is to say: We may show either that the proposition is not in accordance with the nature of things, i.e., with absolute, objective truth; or that it is inconsistent with other statements or admissions of our opponent, i.e., with truth as it appears to him.

Presenting one of the stratagems, he adds:

This is chiefly practicable in a dispute between scholars in the presence of the unlearned. If you have no argument *ad rem*, and none either *ad hominem*, you can make one *ad auditores*; that is to say, you can start some invalid objection, which, however, only an expert sees to be invalid. Now your opponent is an expert, but those who form your audience are not, and accordingly in their eyes he is defeated (Schopenhauer 2009: 26).

*Ad auditores* seems to be a technical device. In a dispute it disregards both the complexity of the issue and the burden of proof referring solely to the judgment of the audience by giving them the appropriate simplified explication. Therefore the relationship between eristic and rhetoric can be presented as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The modes of argumentation in rhetoric according to Aristotle</th>
<th>The modes of refuting the opponent’s thesis according to Schopenhauer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logos</td>
<td><em>Ad rem</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethos</td>
<td><em>Ad hominem</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathos</td>
<td><em>Ad auditores</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three pillars of eristic refutation contain the inventory of 38 stratagems, several of which are presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The modes of refuting the opponent’s thesis according to Schopenhauer</th>
<th>Eristic stratagems in <em>The Art of Controversy</em> (selection)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Ad rem</em></td>
<td>- Generalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Homonymy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Making the opponent’s relative thesis sound absolute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ad hominem</em></td>
<td>- Teasing the opponent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Urging the opponent to extend his statement further than he meant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Personal attack</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Distortions in the sphere of argumentation include *logos* as well as *ethos* and *pathos*. The argument *ad rem*, according to Schopenhauer, would be characterized as the one referring to things, to the matter of dispute, rather than to a solid argument, as it is generally acknowledged in some of the later studies. Argument distortion in interactions referred to as eristic occurs at all levels of argumentation and co-exists with the arguments based on the intersubjectively acceptable premise. It seems that Schopenhauer’s intuition inclines towards understanding eristicity as a fraud in all modes of argumentation. For Aristotle, however, eristic resided in the sphere of *logos*.

Schopenhauer’s theory evolves in the works by Kotarbiński, who has been a propagator of *Eristic Dialectic* (*Eristische Dialektik*) in Poland. In the Preface to the 1973 Polish edition Kotarbiński writes:

If dispute is a kind of fight, then eristic – the art of disputation – is on the one hand a component of the broader argumentative craftsmanship, and, on the other hand, a particular instance of a fight . . . The topic of Schopenhauer’s essay undoubtedly pertains to such a broad understanding of eristic, yet, it is merely its fragment.

What emerges from this fragment is an interesting dichotomy in evaluation. Eristic referred to as “the art of disputation” carries positive connotations. It is the skill worth acquiring and improving, which entails practicality to demonstrate proficiency in formulating positions in the dispute. Kotarbiński is far from condemning eristic, which is demonstrated in definitions and evaluations accompanying his interpretations. For him eristic is “the art of disputation in order to win the argument in front of those who determine the verdict, that is a judge or a jury” (Kotarbiński 1993: 415). What strikes us in this definition is the absence of remarks on eristic methods. Kotarbiński discusses them later when he divides them into “purely technical tricks” and “disloyal gimmicks.” In the introduction he writes:

We are not going to try here to teach you how to lead a dispute with one goal – victory – even at the expense of truth and fairness. However, we will indicate the most eminent

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1. According to Szymanek (2001: 60) *ad rem* is an argument which premises are true objectively rather than true only in the opinion of the audience.
eristic tricks since you should know how to avail yourself of these methods loyally in the right cause and how they can be used by a disloyal and cunning adversary (Kotarbiński 1993: 415).

Elsewhere Kotarbiński (2003: 272) defines eristic in the following way:

Competence in the art of disputation, that is the exchange of arguments in order to win the recognition of the decisive body; the art of discussing and refuting the counterarguments as well as convincing others of the validity of our exposition.

Kotarbiński sees eristic as a special instance of the general theory of warfare applied to the area of verbal dispute. It is no exaggeration to say that the author is fascinated with the methods of designing the dispute as well as with devising argumentative tactics securing the favourable outcome.

The current difficulty with clarifying the meaning of eristic is associated with identification and selection of sources for methodological insights. A classical Aristotelian concept differs from that of Schopenhauer and his followers. Eristic persuasion may therefore mean “dishonest persuasion” or simply “persuasion implicated in dispute.” The definitions presented below indicate the differences between these approaches:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Definitions of eristic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aristotle</td>
<td>The contentious argument stands in somewhat the same relation to the dialectical as the drawer of false diagrams to the geometrician (On Sof. Ref. 171 b35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For just as a foul in a race is a definite type of fault, and is a kind of foul fighting, so the art of contentious reasoning is foul fighting in disputation (On Sof. Ref. 171b 22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schopenhauer</td>
<td>The science of man’s innate desire to always be right. (The Art of Controversy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The art of disputing, and of disputing in such a way as to hold one’s own, whether one is in the right or the wrong — per fas et nefas (The Art of Controversy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotarbiński</td>
<td>Competence in the art of disputation, that is the exchange of arguments in order to win the recognition of the decisive body; the art of discussing and refuting the counterarguments as well as convincing others of the validity of our exposition (Prakseologia)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These three definitions show a significant shift in the areas in which eristic is conceptualized. These entail the consent for eristic with simultaneous broadening of its applicability. They range from a narrow concept – the set of tricks
(argumentative fouls, sophisms, fallacies, manipulative tactics), to a broader one – the art of disputation, that is an autonomous field of knowledge about standards of its use.

The absence of “new eristic” in Anglo-American research seems striking. The term “eristic” in the studies of communication exhibits its classical dimension. According to Walton (2004: 139), eristic dialogue consists in the exchange of verbal arguments, in which each side attacks the opponent in person. The best-known type of dialogue is an argument in which both sides act on emotion and blame each other by pointing out their adversaries’ character flaws (Walton 2004: 139). Walton notes that the participants in eristic dialogue remain unresponsive to each other’s arguments (see Lewiński 2012). It seems to me that this phenomenon is characteristic of an argument presented here as an example of eristic dialogue. However, the indifference to the arguments in a debate exhibits a totally different dimension. Indeed, the participants are not open to cooperation in the field of persuasion since they do not accept the opponent’s line of argumentation. Yet they are willing to collaborate on the strategy of the dispute as they must both control it. Kotarbiński calls it negative cooperation which primary goal is to “make things difficult for your opponent” (Kotarbinski 1982: 221). Both sides are forcing each other to overcome obstacles using the techniques of dispute. The eristic and ritualistic approach to dispute thwarts reconciliation. It only becomes possible when the participants descend from the audience and free themselves from the control of the verdict-makers, such as voters or judges. Only then is positive cooperation achievable and consensus, such as mediation instead of court trial (debate), can be reached.

Wayne C. Booth (2004: 43) does not use the term “eristic” when he presents his division of the manifestations of rhetoric in various areas of communication. Referring to eristic, Booth introduces the new term: “Win-Rhetoric” (WR). This kind of rhetoric is applied by those who want to win at all cost. Booth formulates three interpretations of the “Win-Rhetoric” (WR):

1. WR a – the honest kind. The purpose of the speaker is to win because he knows that his case is right. His methods are sincere and honest. The reasons for the opponent’s rhetorical activity are unfair.
2. WR b – the speaker’s case is justified and he will fight for victory by any means, including unfair methods.
3. WR c – the speaker knows that his case is wrong, but he will fight to win the dispute.
Booth’s passion for neologisms resulted in a choice of a new name for the Win-Rhetoric, which he described as “rhetrickery,” that is “the whole range of shoddy dishonest communicative arts producing misunderstanding - along with other harmful results. The arts of making the worse seem the better course” (Booth 2004: 11). For Booth a particular danger resulting from the use of distorted rhetoric concerns the realm of politics and media.

The author’s reflection goes towards maintaining the unity of rhetoric and merging different forms of argumentation, persuasion and manipulation as manifestations of rhetoricity. Thus Booth invents the terms such as Win-Rhetoric, Listening-Rhetoric and Bargain-Rhetoric and, for those who use them, he defines what is ethical and unethical in every aspect of the situational and teleological sphere.

The trends observed in contemporary research in Russia confirm that the new eristic is not a local phenomenon reflecting specific fondness for Schopenhauer’s treatise in Poland. Studies by Russian scholars develop Schopenhauer’s intuitions and demonstrate the orientation towards eristic’s autonomy as a field “serving” dispute:

Eristic as the art of dispute presumes the victory regardless of the methods which are used. The speech is focused on obtaining the right to act and receive a conclusive judgment (Roždestvenskij 1997: 115).

Eristic - the art of the disputation. Eristic as the analysis and formation of dispute is justified and useful (Kratkiy slovar’ po logike, 1991).

As a discipline, eristic can manifest itself in two forms: pure (theoretical) and applicable. Any study can be considered as applied eristic (as discussions on a specific topic, with a specific subject and based on specific rules). Such disputes provide extensive material for generalizations and allow for constructing individual subjects of eristic. Eristic can also be defined as a practical embodiment of many disciplines. Eristic is the result of using philosophy, logic, rhetoric, ethics, aesthetics, psychology, linguistics and other sciences (Blažević, Selivanov 1999: 9).

2. A similar intuition was expressed by Bachtin (1986: 504): “The rhetorical dispute is an argument, which is not so much about getting closer to the truth, as about defeating the enemy. This is a lesser form of rhetoric.”
Conclusion

In classical eristic the craftsmanship of interlocutors stems from a skill for formal transformations in the sphere of *logos* and from imitating non-fallacious reasoning. Yet this has earned eristic its bad reputation among systematic philosophers. Except for the personal benefit there is no positive value inherent in eristic endeavour. The lack of basic principles of Greek *paideia* had to raise strong opposition to the tricks used by the Sophists. The argument against eristic in its classical form is that eristic pretends to be dialectic, which stands for reasoning that aims to gain knowledge. The truth is that eristic imitates the movements of dialectic (visible in the interaction and the exchange of arguments), but performs transformations involving the figurative element of rhetoric in both the *verba* (*fallacia in dictione*) and *res* (*fallacia extra dictionem*).

New eristic expands the area of communicative behavior. It lays claim to dispute management (Blaževič, Selivanov), contemporary agonology (Kotarbiński) and the art of winning the dispute regardless of the type of evidence apparatus (Schopenhauer). Proclaiming its independent existence as a method or system of communication with a high acclaim among scholars (including Polish ones) would be an overstatement. This however does not change the fact that the post-Schopenhauerian concept of eristic differs from the classical approach. The dilemmas and questions related to the understanding and valuation of eristic in communication posed at the beginning of the article can only be solved by determining the choice of theory which formed the basis for a conceptualization of eristic in a given case.

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Erystyka i spór – aplikacje i interpretacje

koncepcji erystyki, umożliwi odczytanie jej przejawów (strategii argumentacyjnych i problemów z obszaru etyki) w interakcjach komunikacyjnych.

Słowa kluczowe: erystyka, Arystoteles, Kotarbiński, Schopenhauer, retoryka zwycięstwa