

ARGUMENT AS METHOD: ITS NATURE, ITS LIMITATIONS AND ITS USES

DOUGLAS EHNINGER

WHEN A engages in argument with B he seeks not to enlarge his antagonist's stock of information, but to disabuse him of error; not to add to B's repertory of facts or data, but to reshape a belief or alter an attitude which B already entertains. Argument, in short, instead of being an enterprise in instruction, is an exercise in correction. Its purpose is not to extend knowledge, but to reform and to purify it.¹

To place argument in the genus of correction is, however, but an initial step. It is the burden of this paper to refine the description by delineating the methodological assumptions upon which argument as a species of correction rests.² To this end, I shall, first, contrast the arguer's method with another and more familiar sort of correction—that designed to compel or coerce conformity with the corrector's view. Then, using this contrast as my ground, I shall

examine the boundaries or limits within which argument is confined and review the uses which it may serve.

I

Correction designed to coerce conformity with the corrector's view takes a number of forms. The teacher points to the "facts" recorded in a standard textbook or reference work, the layman orders the skeptic to use his eyes and his ears, the father exercises the right of parental control, the propagandist employs psychic or social pressures, the bully resorts to threats and to physical force. In all of these cases in which the corrective act is designed to compel adherence, however, certain common characteristics are present.

First, viewed as a process, the correction is unilateral. The lines of influence flow in a single direction from the corrector at one pole of the transaction to the correctee at the other. Not only does the corrector initiate the exchange and direct it throughout its history, but he also dictates the conditions under which it will terminate. His sole aim is to secure compliance, with the correctee's assent if possible, or without it if necessary. Although the corrector may hope that the reasons for his directive become apparent, and that the response will, therefore, be voluntary rather than forced, under normal circumstances he will not hesitate to impose such penalties or offer such rewards as facilitate the achieving of his goal.

The correctee, by contrast, is cast in an inert and passive role. He is merely

Mr. Ehninger is Professor of Speech at the University of Iowa.

¹ Cf. in this connection Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., *Philosophy and Argument* (University Park, Pa., 1959), pp. 13-14. Instead of viewing argument as a species of "correction," Johnstone prefers to regard it as a special form of "criticism."

² The analysis here offered, it should be emphasized, is strictly of argument as "method" rather than as "act" and therefore is paradigmatic rather than descriptive. My concern is not with the movements that may or may not occur, the behaviors that may or may not obtain, or the attitudes that may or may not be present in any given argumentative interchange; it is with the defining characteristics of argument as a mode, or as I have said, a "method" of decision-making—with those abstract conditions or presuppositions upon which "acts" of argument are predicated.

For an earlier and less fully developed statement of certain of the ideas advanced in Sections III and IV of this paper, see my article "Debate as Method: Limitations and Values," *ST*, XV (1966), 180-185.

the "object" toward which the correction is directed, the sink or receptacle into which the approved information is poured, the "body" whose behavior is to be modified. In every respect, the relationship is one in which a person who possesses superior knowledge or authority admonishes another who is inferior in these respects.

Second, correction that is coercive in nature does not in principle admit of various levels or kinds of success. Either the correctee obeys as ordered, in which case the corrector succeeds completely, or he fails to do so, in which case the effort must be written off as a failure and punishments of one sort or another imposed. A compromise in which the correctee agrees to split the difference between his original response and the one required is not regarded as satisfactory; a qualified acceptance or a promise to consider the matter further is entirely beside the point—is *prima facie* evidence that the nature and purpose of the corrective act have been misunderstood.

Third, in coercive correction the corrector's own attitude toward the rule he is enforcing or the fact upon which he is insisting is not a relevant concern. He may be strongly convinced of its validity or importance, or he may regard it as invalid or trivial, and therefore require adherence only because a higher authority demands that he do so. Whatever his attitude, the desired alteration of belief or action still will be effected. The frequently heard excuse, "I do not make the rules or invent the answers; I only enforce them," stands as proof that in this species of correction the attitude of the corrector is not germane.

Fourth, because coercive correction is by nature unilateral—because the lines of influence and control flow only from the corrector as agent to the cor-

rectee as object—though the corrector may under certain circumstances expose himself to physical danger or social opprobrium, he runs no risk to his own integrity as a "person"; no risk that as a result of his action his own orientation and outlook, his own constitutive pattern of attitudes and convictions, will have to be radically altered. If, in spite of his best efforts, the correctee stubbornly continues to resist, the corrector may attribute his failure to a breakdown in communication or to an inability to summon the necessary degree of authority; or he may write the correctee off as ignorant or incorrigible. At the worst, therefore, the corrector will only experience frustration or anger; he will not be obliged to readjust in any fundamental way the particular configuration of beliefs and values that mark him out as a discrete and identifiable "person."

II

Now by way of contrast, let us consider the case of the arguer who, convinced that another's beliefs are invalid or pernicious, attempts "to set that party straight" by engaging him in argument. In what ways does the arguer's method of effecting correction differ from the coercive or constraining sort of correction described above?

First, and of crucial importance, it should be observed that in this new situation the lines of influence, instead of flowing only in one direction, flow in two; that the corrective process, instead of being unilateral, is bilateral. In choosing to argue with another rather than employing some form of coercion to achieve his end, the protagonist enters into an agreement of a special sort; and this is to give his opponent an opportunity to correct him, not only by presenting the other side of the issue but also by probing the per-

tinence or wisdom of the correction urged. Were this opportunity not offered and implemented by appropriate behavior on the antagonist's part, the interchange would die aborning, and even though the protagonist might present an abundance of evidence to support his view, he still would be attempting to gain his end unilaterally.

Because argument is bilateral—because as an essential aspect of its method the antagonist is granted an opportunity to weigh the case presented to him and to probe it for weaknesses or errors—the correctee, instead of being an inert object or sink, is an active participant in the correction process. Initiative and control, instead of resting entirely with one party, pass back and forth as each expounds his own view and criticizes the view of the other. Nor would the protagonist as corrector have it otherwise. In selecting argument as his instrument he announces to his opponent and to the world that rather than seeking compliance on any terms, he seeks a particular sort of compliance—one which because it rests on understanding and honors the principle of free choice may properly be called "assent." By employing only those facts and inferences for which he is willing to be held responsible and by granting his opponent an opportunity to consider and to reply, the protagonist hopes that this party will, in effect, come to correct himself; will, as a result of his own efforts, see why his present view is wrong or the proposed alternative superior. Were this not the case, the protagonist surely would reject argument in favor of persuasion by the more dependable means of physical force or psychic coercion.

Second, the correction advanced by the arguer, unlike that employed by the teacher, parent, or propagandist, is enforceable neither by fact nor by fiat.

Instead, it rests upon the unstable ground of probabilities and values—on estimates that in the end may turn out to be false and on judgments concerning not how the world is, but how in the opinion of the protagonist it ought to be. Where constraining proofs are available argument is superfluous, for here the proper procedure is at most to explain or review the proof by which the rule is established or the fact verified, and at the least to command adherence. Only when the evidence falls short of demonstration is argument an appropriate tool.

Third, in contrast to correction of the coercive sort, the correction engaged in by the arguer permits of various levels and kinds of success. For while total agreement in the form of capitulation may be the result the protagonist prefers, in those myriad cases in which there is much to be said on both sides of an issue it would be strange indeed to regard as a complete failure a "case" that eventuated in a compromise or won a qualified acceptance. Moreover, proof in the abstract as an accumulation of evidence and inference sufficient to establish a claim in principle must be distinguished from "proof to a person" as an accumulation of evidence and inference which does, in fact, effect conviction in a given instance. The arguer, no less than the person who engages in a rhetorical effort that is unilateral in nature, can hardly be said to have failed if within the limits set by his method he overlooks no possibility for attaining his end.³

Fourth, as contrasted with coercive correction, where the attitude of the corrector is irrelevant, in argument the attitude of the corrector is of crucial importance. In choosing argument as his instrument the protagonist at the

³ Aristotle *Rhetorica* 1355b.

outset sets himself off from the naked persuader, on the one hand, and from the neutralist, on the other, by assuming a posture of restrained partisanship. Because he believes that his opponent labors in error, and believes this so strongly that he is motivated to do something about it, he patently is a partisan. At the same time, by selecting the bilateral method of argument rather than the unilateral methods of force or suggestion as his corrective tool, he voluntarily places upon his effort limits which curb its persuasiveness. In contracting to submit his directive to examination and rebuttal, he sets his case on its own legs—asks that it be given only that degree of credence which upon study it is found to deserve. Instead of avoiding or short circuiting the reflective process, the protagonist addresses it head on, and in this sense stands poised between the desire to control and the conviction that whatever control he achieves shall be achieved only in the right way and for the right reason. The antagonist also must play the role of a restrained partisan—must stand poised between the desire to maintain his present view and a willingness to accept the judgment which a critical examination of that view yields. Bilaterality, in brief, while a necessary condition for argument, is not a sufficient one. In addition, there must be a consciously induced state of intellectual and moral tension, precariously maintained in the face of strong drives to thwart it. When such tension is absent the motive to effect or to resist correction is lacking and no interchange occurs. When, on the contrary, tension becomes too great the bond of common interest by which the conflicting drives are held together breaks, and one or both parties, losing the requisite poise, resort to psychic or physical pressures to enforce their views. Just as the strings

of a violin must be neither too slack nor too taut if the instrument is to perform properly, so must the threads which unite the parties to an argument be precisely tuned.⁴

Fifth, whereas correction that is coercive entails no risk to the corrector as a "person," correction through argument is, in a very real sense, a "person-risking" enterprise. By entering upon argument in any but a playful mood, a disputant opens the possibility that as a result of the interchange he may be persuaded of his opponent's view, or, failing that, at least may be forced to make major alterations in his own. In either case, he will emerge from the interchange with a different pattern of convictions, values, and attitudes than he held when he entered it, and to this extent will be a different "self" or "person." Yet, obviously, this is exactly what he does not wish to happen, for were he indifferent or passive—willing to be remolded as another desires—he would not have engaged in argument in the first place; would not have undertaken to uphold by evidence and reasoning the pattern of convictions or values which he originally entertained.

By laying on the line for examination and criticism a view in which he believes so strongly that he not only wishes to maintain it but also to impress it upon others, the arguer lays himself on the line also. Were he not willing to face these risks to his own orientation and integrity as a "person," he would seek to avoid or to stifle opposition rather than to invite it.

In correction of the coercive genre, where commitment to end is paramount and commitment to method is secondary, the "person" may be sheltered or by-

⁴ A somewhat different discussion of the same point may be found in Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockriede, *Decision by Debate* (New York, 1963), pp. 18-19.

passed. In correction through argument, where the relative positions of end and method are reversed, there is no "exit" through which the "person" may escape from the risks which the encounter entails, no place where the "self" may hide.⁵

In review, then, the correction of the arguer is bilateral and nonenforceable, permits of various levels and kinds of success, demands a posture of restrained partisanship, and places the "person" in a position of genuine existential "risk."

III

Bearing these characteristics of the arguer's method in mind, let us next consider the limitations to which this method is prone. First, argument by nature is indecisive; second, it can encompass only those situations in which mutually exclusive alternatives present themselves; third, it is imprisoned in the "world of words"; and, fourth, it addresses itself exclusively to means, and never to ends.

Argument as method is indecisive because it has no built-in stage of resolution toward which it is directed and in terms of which it reaches completion as a logical and psychological whole.

Arguments as acts are initiated when an existing belief or condition is challenged with a view to substituting some alternative belief or condition which the protagonist as issuer of the challenge prefers. If supported by evidence and inference sufficient to make out a *prima facie* case, such a challenge poses a threat to the party who favors things as they are or who prefers a reordering

different from the one proposed. Unless this party is willing to see his cause fail by default, he is, therefore, obliged to bestir himself, and, assuming the role of antagonist, to come forth with responses which either will turn back the initiating challenge or will implant a preferred substitute in its place.

Such counter-action, however, merely arouses the protagonist to new efforts. Now it is he who must enter into the developing dispute additional probative elements capable of raising his cause above the obstructions introduced by his opponent. And so the interchange continues, each party alternately arousing himself as a result of action by the other, in a series of moves and counter-moves the specific nature of which is determined by the history of the controversy itself.⁶

Moreover, so far as argument as method is concerned, no one of the foregoing moves or counter-moves is decisive in that it leaves the opposing party without an opportunity to answer. The answer that is made may be strong or weak, relevant or irrelevant. This, however, will be determined not by the resources of argument as such, but by the weight of the evidence with which the answer is supported and the acuteness of the disputant in directing his remarks to the point in question. Because a party to an argument can be beaten into submission neither by the "stick" of fact nor by the "stick" of formal demonstration, argument as a process theoretically is interminable.⁷

⁶ A more detailed description of this process may be found in James M. O'Neill, Craven Laycock, and Robert L. Scales, *Argumentation and Debate* (New York, 1923), pp. 33-41.

⁵ Conflicting interpretations of the "risk" element in argument are presented in Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., "Some Reflections on Argumentation," *Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Argumentation*, ed. Maurice Natanson and Henry W. Johnstone, Jr. (University Park, Pa., 1965), pp. 1-9; and Maurice Natanson, "The Claims of Immediacy," *Ibid.*, pp. 10-19.

⁷ This point is discussed fully in Douglas Ehninger, "Validity as Moral Obligation," *Southern Speech Journal*, XXXIII (1968), 215-222; reprinted in *The Rhetoric of Our Times*, ed. J. Jeffery Auer (New York, 1969), pp. 165-171. Cf. Friedrich Waismann, "How I See Philosophy," *Contemporary British Philosophy*, 3rd series, ed. H. D. Lewis (London, 1956); re-

Arguments as acts end not because argument as method has completed a natural cycle; because the resources or possibilities of argument itself have been exhausted. Instead, they terminate for reasons external to argument as method. All of the available evidence may have been exploited; the disputants may weary of the fray or be called to some other activity; changes in the environment may render obsolete the problem agitated; hitherto overlooked or unknown facts may intervene to provide a mutually acceptable solution; a stipulated time limit may have expired. If these or similar circumstances did not arise, however, arguments as acts could continue indefinitely; and because some controversial subjects command an endlessly fresh and varied body of evidence, never weary the interest, and are immune to the intervention of facts, they are indeed perennial.⁸

Because argument as method lacks a natural terminus—does not approach through progressive stages a point which by common consent constitutes a resolution of the problem that motivates it—unlike the analytic procedures of mathematics and logic, it does not of itself supply answers or decisions which men need but observe and record. It merely provides the grounds upon which decisions may be made, so that ultimately it is always man himself who must decide the problem out of which an argument arises; who, from observing argument as a bystander or engaging in it as a participant, must estimate what the optimum choice or decision will be.

Various criteria have been developed to aid in this judgmental task, so that in the law, for example, we have the

standards of preponderance of proof or proof beyond reasonable doubt. But such criteria are not indigenous to argument as such. Rather, they are external or imposed; are artificially impressed upon a process which itself has no resources for measuring or interpreting the significance of what it reveals.

Because argument as method does not supply answers to the problems that motivate it, the worth of any decision which may emerge from an argumentative exchange is to a considerable extent dependent upon the good sense and acumen of the individuals who make it. If they are wise and perceptive and read aright the signs and portents the argument provides, their judgment will be the better; if they are foolish, or inattentive, or prejudiced, or inexperienced in the process of dispute, it will be the worse. Argument itself has no built-in guarantees that the persons who engage in it will interpret its findings properly or use them wisely.

A second limitation of argument as method is that the participants in any one argumentative act can consider but a single pair of alternatives, and these alternatives must be mutually exclusive.

Arguments, of necessity, thus are limited because only such causes or parts of causes as are mutually exclusive can statiate, and causes or parts of causes which are mutually exclusive pose choice situations of such a nature that unless judgment is reserved, it is necessary to endorse one of the alternatives and to reject the other.

A dispute growing out of the claim "We should vote for Jones" as answered by the claim "We should not vote for Jones" statiates immediately on the cause level, for those statements are exclusive in the sense that one cannot both vote and not-vote for Jones. When the claim "We should vote for Jones" is answered by the claim "We should vote for

printed in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A. J. Ayer (Glencoe, Ill., 1959), pp. 345-380. Also see John Passmore, *Philosophical Reasoning* (New York, 1961), p. 36.

⁸ Cf. Mortimer Adler, *Dialectic* (New York, 1927), pp. 101, 105, 198, 217, etc.

Smith," as the ancients recognized, stia-tion is delayed until supporting con-ventions as appropriately responded to ("We should vote for Jones because he is better qualified." "He is not better qualified.") give rise to a specific issue ("Is Jones better qualified?").⁹ Eventu-ally, however, if causes are to stiate and controversy to become possible one or more pairs of mutually exclusive state-ments must be advanced by the contend-ing parties.

A disputant may have various reasons for answering as he does the question which emerges out of the initial con-flict of claims, or he may hedge or qualify his answer in various ways. But because the claims are mutually exclusive, unless he is to reserve judgment—which is tanta-mount to refusing to answer—in the end he always is obliged to affirm or deny; to say "yes" or "no" to the possibility which the stiation raises.

Argumentative interchanges which at first appear to be multilateral or uni-lateral actually consist of a series of bilateral encounters conducted consecu-tively. If, for example, friends dispute whether to proceed to a common des-tination by train, by plane, or by car, he who chooses as his cause the claim, "We should go by train" must engage the advocates of plane and car separately, so that in reality there are two arguments centering in the sub-questions "Should we go by train or plane?" and "Should we go by train or car?" On the other hand, when an individual debates with himself in an effort to choose between alternative conclusions or courses of ac-tion, he adopts the roles of protagonist and antagonist successively.

Third, argument as method is limited because it is exclusively a verbal phe-nomenon—a creature imprisoned in "the world of words."

Non-verbal behaviors of various sorts—postures, facial expressions, gestures, and the like—may inform, persuade, or command; or they may be offered as re-sponses to informative, persuasive, or im-perative messages. Objects such as guns, clothes, or diamonds also may operate rhetorically. But physical behaviors countered by physical behaviors result in wars, gang fights, or games, not in argu-ments; and while inanimate objects countered by inanimate objects may pose choice situations, these encounters do not give rise to disputable questions until the alternatives have been verbalized. The question, like the negative, must be born of discourse, and without a question to which conflicting answers may be of-fered verbally, argument cannot exist.

Because argument is exclusively an affair of discourse, not only is it limited to such dealings as may be carried on among men, but it is able to affect "the world of not-words" only through the intervention of man as an agent. If he chooses to ignore its lessons or if he mis-interprets them or is unable to devise the machinery necessary to put them into effect, argument is impotent. Moreover, it is the obligation of the disputants themselves to enter into argument those facts and experiences of the "real world" which prevent it from becoming an ex-ercise in futility. Neither in the gathering of the resources with which it works nor in the effectuating of the results it pro-duces is argument as such able to reach that world in its own right.¹⁰

Fourth, and last, argument as method is limited by the fact that it is applicable only to the selection of means and never to the determination of the ends toward which these means are directed.

Just as every act of argument lies within a certain problem or subject matter universe, so also it lies within a certain universe of values. This second

⁹ See, for example, *Rhetorica ad Herennium* I, xvi-xvii.

¹⁰ Cf. Adler, p. 33.

universe is defined by a common end or goal at which the disputants aim, and no less than the problem universe to which it is related this end determines the boundaries beyond which the dispute cannot in reason wander.

If two friends differ on whether they will gain greater satisfaction from dining at Restaurant A or Restaurant B, because the causes are simple and immediate, the common end at which they aim—that of maximum enjoyment—will exhibit like qualities. When, on the other hand, as in a dispute concerning political persuasions or social philosophies, the causes are broad and complex, the end aimed at may be remote or abstract.

Always, however, some agreed upon end or goal must be present to define and delimit the evaluative ground within which the interchange is to proceed. When such ground is lacking, argument itself, let alone any hope of resolution or agreement, becomes impossible. The absence of a commonly accepted aim or value is what lies at the root of many of the breakdowns that occur, for example, in negotiations between the Communist and Western nations, and what accounts for the well known futility of most disputes on matters of politics or religion. When disputants hold different values their claims pass without touching, just as they pass when different subjects are being discussed. What one party says simply is evaluatively irrelevant to the position of the other.

An examination of the nature of ends or values need not concern us here. Perhaps at bottom they are matters of feeling, of personal style or taste. The important point is that they lie on a deeper stratum than argument is capable of penetrating; they are something which argument cannot shape or determine but which it must presuppose—something which any two disputants need to assume

and agree upon as a necessary condition of argumentative interchange.¹¹

This limitation does not mean that argument as method is incapable of dealing with very broad and fundamental questions; that it cannot, for instance, compare democracy and totalitarianism as forms of government or wisdom-seeking and wealth-seeking as goals of human activity. What it does mean is that argument is incapable of exploring the value frame within which an act of argument arising out of these comparisons or out of the conflict between any pair of competing alternatives must, in turn, be embedded. Whatever the range of the subject agitated or of the value questioned, a still more embracing value must in endless regress provide a common evaluative ground upon which the contending parties may meet to exchange their views.¹² At the extreme, this ground may consist of nothing more than a mutual preference for "talking it out" rather than "fighting it out," but to explore even these alternatives through argument presupposes an agreement that the first method is preferable to the second.

IV

Having, then, examined the nature of argument and reviewed the limits within which as a method it is confined, let us in concluding our discussion consider what the uses and values of argument may be.

We take as our premise the commonplace observation that there exist in the world as a given fact of experience an

¹¹ See in this connection A. Craig Baird, "Responsibilities of Free Communication," *Vital Speeches*, Sept. 1, 1952, pp. 699-701. Cf. Peter A. Schouls, "Communication, Argumentation, and Presupposition in Philosophy," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, II (Fall 1969), 183-199.

¹² Cf. Aristotle *Rhetorica* 1362a, where deliberative speaking is limited to the selection of means as distinguished from the determination of ends.

abundance of problem situations which call for a choice between mutually exclusive alternatives, and in which "facts" as such either are absent or are not coercively determining.

When confronted with problem situations of this sort, men may arrive at decisions on the basis of chance, or they may rely upon authority, intuition, or argument. For at least two reasons, argument is to be preferred to the other possibilities: first, it is more reliable than they are; and, second, it is more humane.

Aside from its obvious superiority over chance, argument is superior to authority and intuition as a way of arriving at reliable decisions because it is self-regulative, while they are not.¹³

Irrespective of whatever controls may be placed upon argument from without, inherent in the method itself is that internal check which William James termed "the test of enlightened self-interest"; the provision that in addition to presenting his own view of the matter, the arguer is required to defend that view against the attacks of an earnest and informed opponent.

Nor would the parties who contract to this mutual examination of their positions have it otherwise, for, as Johnstone properly has pointed out, unlike those forms of correction and control in which effectiveness is enhanced by denying power to others, the potency of argumentative appeals is enhanced by granting to another the same measure of power that one would reserve for himself.¹⁴ In freely submitting his own view to criticism, the arguer not only earns the right to criticize the view of his opponent, but more importantly, imposes upon his opponent an obligation to observe in the presentation of his case the

same standards of adequacy and fairness which that party would impose upon him. Out of these mutual obligations and opportunities, the self-regulative character of argument is born.

But besides being reliable in a way that authority and intuition are not, argument also is more humane because it elevates and dignifies man, while the alternative methods minimize and degrade him.

Decisions arrived at by chance or intuition or by appeal to authority are "disrespectful" of man as a rational being. By contrast, argument as a self-regulative method which promotes reflection honors those qualities that characterize man at his finest. This is not to deny that argument at times has been misused; that adherence to argument as a way of knowing or of choosing without an adequate appreciation of its limitations has resulted in periods when thought stagnated and prejudice ruled. Such misuse, however, as Adler reminds us, is to be charged not against argument as a method, but rather against those agents who out of ignorance or wilfulness have perverted or misapplied it.¹⁵ Restricted to the uses for which it is fitted and practiced in the spirit of mutual inquiry which represents its finest tradition, argument, despite its limitations, deserves to stand beside science on the one hand and logic and mathematics on the other as a major instrument for arriving at decisions that not only are reliable but also are humane.

Finally, and of supreme importance, because argument is "person-risking" it is "person-making." By accepting the risks implicit in an attitude of restrained partisanship the arguer both bestows "personhood" on his opponent and gains "personhood" for himself. For to enter upon argument with a full understand-

¹³ See Ehninger and Brockriede, pp. 16-22.

¹⁴ Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., "The Nature of Philosophical Controversy," *The Journal of Philosophy*, LI (May 13, 1954), 295-296.

¹⁵ Adler, p. 185.

ing of the commitments which as a method it entails is to experience that alchemic moment of transformation in which the ego-centric gives way to the alter-centric; that moment when, in the language of Buber, the *Ich-Es* is replaced by the *Ich-Du*; when the "other," no longer regarded as an "object" to be manipulated, is endowed with those qualities of "freedom" and "responsibility" that change the "individual" as "thing" into the "person" as "not-thing."¹⁶

But this process also is reflexive, for insofar as we treat the "other" as a person rather than as an "object," we become persons ourselves; while insofar as we fail to do so, our own "personhood" is to that extent diminished. The attributes of freedom and responsibility that are defining of the "person" are not absolutes with respect to the "other," but are states that are reached only in "relationship." Relation, inclusion, experience from the opposite side, the capacity to comprehend the contradiction which opposition entails, these are not merely

descriptive of the human condition; they are constitutive. The *I* attains to its full potential only when, and only to the extent that, it meets the "other" as a *Thou*.

Argument as a way of "living through a common experience from the other side," as a reciprocal honoring of the "person" rather than a unilateral exploitation of the biological or economic individual, is, therefore, a way of gaining "freedom" and "responsibility" by granting "freedom" and "responsibility"; a way of achieving "personhood" for oneself by bestowing "personhood" upon another. Johnstone has remarked that the creature who refuses to argue or to listen to arguments must, of necessity, remain something less than human.¹⁷ Because man is by nature a social animal he attains complete humanity only when he enters into such relationships as argument provides. The ultimate justification of argument as method, therefore, lies not in any pragmatic test of results achieved or disasters avoided. Rather it lies in the fact that by introducing the arguer "into a situation of risk in which open-mindedness and tolerance are possible,"¹⁸ it paves the way toward "personhood" for the disputants, and through them and millions like them opens the way to a society in which the values and commitments requisite to "personhood" may some day replace the exploitation and strife which now separate man from man and nation from nation.

¹⁶ Martin Buber, *Ich und Du* (Leipzig, 1923). For an English translation of this work, see *I and Thou*. With a Postscript by the Author Added. Tr. Ronald Gregor Smith, 2nd ed. (New York, 1958). Readers interested in exploring further the relation between argument and "personhood" should see in particular Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite*, tr. G. Phelan (New York, 1959) and *The Person and the Common Good*, tr. J. Fitzgerald (New York, 1947); Gabriel Marcel, *The Decline of Wisdom* (New York, 1955); Soren A. Kierkegaard, *Meditations*, tr. T. H. Croxall (Philadelphia, 1955); Jean-Paul Sartre, "Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self," *Readings in Existential Phenomenology*, ed. N. Lawrence and D. O'Connor (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1967) and *The Transcendence of the Ego*, tr. F. Williams and R. Kirkpatrick (New York, 1957).

¹⁷ Johnstone, *Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Argumentation*, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

