

ARGUMENTATION AND POWER RELATION

We all have, and in a unique way for everyone, our own perception of the world and of ourselves. In our relationships with our entourage (as individuals, associations or citizens), we will confront our perception with that of our partners. And there are two major trends in how to do it: looking for common ground or to be on the same page, or trying to be right (meaning : trying to prove the other is wrong). This is reflected in our ways of talking, in our arguments, in the negotiations, as well as in our means of action. The chosen attitude will influence our relationships, the people involved, and the choice of solutions during conflicts.

The classic approach is the one I would like to call more "scientific". The starting point is that my point of view takes precedence over that of the other and the aim consists in bringing him to reason, that is, to adopt my opinion, because I hold the truth, and he didn't understand it. Consequently the arguments are "decreed", they are "certainties" that reveal the "truth", this being the only truth that can be, and necessarily I hold it, it is "obvious".

I caricature, although in some discussions it happens literally like that.

Yet, all our certainties are for most of them signs of beliefs. The more obvious and inalienable things appear to us, the more likely they are not at all.

We feel in danger when our arguments are undermined, because if we consider them as pure truth, dismantling them exposes us. And the more we feel in danger, the more important our defense reactions will be.

The more we defend an argument "tooth and nail", the more likely it is that it doesn't hold water. To accept to undermine it would force us to begin to question the whole structure of our beliefs, which is terribly scary.

In general, people who expose their certainties may be destabilized or irritated, because, by aiming to convince, they try to impose their ideas or opinions, claiming that their statements are truths, and thereby authoritative.

Our beliefs system is thus a screen from who we really are. And we remain hidden behind our certainties.

This way of discussing does not lead to opening oneself to the other, but often leads to lack of understanding, to judgment, leading to grievance, conflict, or also to submission. This prevents the wealth of relationships, it forces to operate in a narrow reality: that of beliefs, prejudices, clichés, certainties. And it is this way of thinking that generates capitalism, injustices, intolerance, fanaticism, wars and terrorism, and so on. We carry in ourselves the same patterns of thought as all that, it's there that the heart of the problem lies. If we do not change that, nothing will change. And only we can change that. But when we start making these types of changes, we have a much greater impact on others, because we are much less in a register of argumentation, but much more in the one of testimony.

The second approach, which I would rather call "authentic" approach, consists in looking for the common point with the opinion of the interlocutor. We then have a starting point to try to better understand the other. This makes it possible either to smooth out the differences of view, or to

evolve each in its perception, depending on whether the relevance of the subject of the other, resonates with us or not.

We will share our convictions or testify, but especially also listen to the other, not in the aim of counter-arguing, but in that to understand him-her, as well as being questioned or challenged by what he-her tells us.

With this mode of communication, if the goal is to convince, it is not primordial. We do not necessarily wait for the other to agree. When we express a conviction, we are aware that we can be mistaken, and if we are not mistaken, we know that our truth is only one truth among others, the reality of the world being multiple. We also know that if the conviction is good, sharing it can convince, even if it is not immediate.

This attitude makes it possible to learn more from others and often to be better recognized or even approved by others. This openness fosters a whole series of positive aspects in the relationship: listening, understanding, mutual respect, self-confidence, tolerance, flexibility, indulgence. Consequently, it allows the enrichment of the relationship itself and the evolution of those who share it.

When we talk about our convictions, when we testify of our experiences, we let the other a lot better to discover who we are. We are more in the authenticity. We do not seek to conquer the other (his opinion) as a territory but even more: we propose ourselves as a land of welcome, and it works reciprocally in general.

An argument of conviction will lead to agreement or to reflection and, at worst, to respect without agreement. And when there is conflict, this way of presenting things will bring more recognition, and often will lead to solutions, creativity and conviviality. And it can radiate well beyond the context where the conflict will be resolved.

When the conversation is not purely intellectual, but it must lead to decisions, actions, solutions; "scientific" argumentation, most often generates a power relation, opposition, and can lead to the path of conflict. We seek to obtain things by pressure, power, authority. Yet, as has already been mentioned, everything obtained in this way, can only remain provisional. Because the balance can be maintained - on any scale: individual, group, global - only if the power relation persists. If the power in the relation disappears, the problem, the conflict reappears. Creativity is almost totally absent from this type of attitude.

In a negotiation where power relation takes place, only two solutions can prevail: that each of the protagonists wins at the expense of the other or, at best, that each give in a part of his ground to the other in order to obtain a fragile balance.

When we manage to get away from the power relation, suddenly all kinds of other solutions can emerge, either intermediate or totally different and often unexpected and more satisfying.

The power relations also bring a lot of harmful behavior: aggressiveness, abuse of power, manipulation, threat, judgment, dishonesty, etc.

It's therefore in our best interest to solve our problems and conflicts through sound negotiation, seeking consensus, conducting our relations whatever they are, and at whatever level, seeking the real understanding of the interlocutor. This implies both the desire for the respect of our needs and the desire for the respect of his needs. And this requires a lot of work to get there. Because it's not just about applying a theory. We must count with our emotions, our impulses, our unconscious desires that we will have to learn to know and manage so that they do not short circuit our good will to improve our way of being.

We can of course switch from one kind of communication to another, many unconscious processes are involved. In fact, there are all kinds of intermediate communications. We can navigate between

the two. But often the beginning of the conversation already indicates the trend in which the conversation will unfold.

Obtaining a solution through the power relation gives satisfaction, contentment, but obtaining it through a relationship of mutual understanding, gives much more than that. Because not only will the solution be more lasting, even innovative, but we will have gained something in the relationship and this, often, is even more important. This is also what motivates us to continue on this path.

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