

Keeping an Open Mind and Having a Sense of Proportion as Virtues in Argumentation

Manteniendo una mente abierta y teniendo un sentido de proporción como virtudes en la argumentación

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Abstract: Virtue-based approaches to epistemology have enjoyed notable success recently, making valuable contributions to long-standing debates. In this paper, I argue, that many of the results from Virtue Epistemology (VE) can be carried over into the arena of argumentation theory, but also that a virtue-based approach is actually better suited for argumentation than it is for justification. First, some of the unresolved challenges for VE, such as the limitations of voluntarism with respect to beliefs, do not have counterparts in argumentation. Second, a new argument for VE based on the concept of cognitive achievements broadens its applicability to arguments. Third, because virtue-based approaches shift in focus from products and processes to agents, and arguments are essentially inter-agent transactions, important new questions come into focus, along with signposts leading to their resolution. Questions about different roles in argument (protagonists, antagonists, judges, spectators) and the virtues needed for each, come into focus, as do questions about *when*, *why* and *with whom* to argue, which often get lost in the shadow of the primary question, *how* we should argue. Finally, two specific virtues - open-mindedness and a sense of proportion - are offered as test cases for Virtue Argumentation Theory.

Keywords: Argumentation, Epistemology, Virtue, Cognitive achievements, Open-mindedness.

Resumen: Los acercamientos a la epistemología basados en la noción de virtud han tenido un notable éxito recientemente, haciendo una estimable contribución a sostenidos debates en este campo. En este trabajo sostengo que muchos resultados de la epistemología de la virtud (VE) pueden llevarse a la arena de la teoría de la argumentación, pero también que tales acercamientos son en realidad mejores para el ámbito de la argumentación que para el problema de la justificación. Primero, algunos de los

desafíos no resueltos de la VE, tales como las limitaciones del voluntarismo con respecto a las creencias, no tienen contraparte en la argumentación. Segundo, un nuevo argumento para la VE basado en el concepto de logro cognitivo amplía su aplicabilidad a los argumentos. Tercero, y ya que los acercamientos basados en la noción de virtud cambian el foco desde los productos y procesos a los agentes, y los argumentos son esencialmente transacciones inter-agentes, nuevas e importantes preguntas ocupan el centro de atención, conjuntamente con... Interrogantes respecto de los diferentes roles en un argumento (protagonistas, antagonistas, jueces, espectadores) y las virtudes necesarias para cada uno, se alzan como los primordiales, en particular aquellos problemas respecto de cuándo, por qué y con quién argumentar, que a menudo se pierden en la sombra de la más bien básica pregunta respecto de cómo deberíamos argumentar. Finalmente, dos virtudes específicas –apertura mental y sentido de la proporción– son ofrecidas como casos experimentales para una teoría de la virtud argumentativa.

Palabras clave: Argumentación, epistemología, virtud, logros cognitivos, apertura mental.

Introduction

Virtue epistemology was consciously modeled on virtue ethics theories with the hope that some of their conceptual breakthroughs and achievements in ethics might be re-created in epistemology. The results exceeded expectations: virtue epistemologies are flourishing, having already made significant contributions to the discourse of epistemology. The change in perspective turned out to be a *broader* perspective, with good effect not only for the answers to traditional epistemological questions, but also for determining which questions to put on the agenda and for understanding how they relate to one another.

I have argued elsewhere that a similar turn in argumentation theory could well have similar results.¹ Because the new perspective is agent-based, it has to pay attention to all the roles that agents play in argumentation. The best arguments engage ideal arguers with worthy opponents before model audiences. Thus, this approach has to be a *broader* perspective, capable of bringing disparate parts of the field into a larger whole and re-shaping the disciplinary agenda. In particular, I will identify two peculiar but especially important critical virtues –open-mindedness and a sense of proportion– that can point to ways to answer a cluster of outstanding questions for argumenta-

¹ Cohen (2005, 2007). See also Aberdein (2006) for further extension and development.

tion theorists, viz., *when*, with *whom*, about *what*, and, above all, *why* we should argue. As a corollary, but of no less importance, it can help us answer *when*, with *whom*, about *what*, and *why* we should not argue. Together, these virtues provide the conditions to maximize the cognitive gains to be had from arguing. In addition, they provide the resources to help bring an argument to successful closure by managing several of the inherent features of argumentation that can make it an unwieldy, open-ended process.

1. The Argument from Cognitive Achievements

It is a great virtue of virtue ethics approaches that they enable us to look very broadly on all the goods in a good life without restricting ourselves to interpersonal actions. Acquired habits and learned skills can be counted as virtues when they are conducive to *any* of those goods. The goods in question have positive value, of course, or else they would not be counted as goods, but they need not be specifically *moral* goods. If we take ethics to be the concern with value generally and morality to be concerned more specifically with actions, we can put it this way: there are ethical but non-moral values and there is more to our ethical lives than our interactions with others. Virtue ethics is better situated than its consequentialist and deontological counterparts to recognize, accommodate, and appreciate these values without flattening them into moral values.

An example commonly used in this context is friendship: it is immediately recognizable as an ethically important good insofar as it contributes value to a life. But someone who is without friends would not be morally blameworthy on that account. It is ethically good but not morally obligatory to have friends. Of course, if one does have friends, then the moral judgment that one is, or is not, a good friend is a separate matter.

There is a parallel point to be made concerning virtue epistemology. Although the VE movement was initially motivated by a traditional epistemological agenda,² it broadens our horizons in similar ways. What began as an attempt to circumvent the debates about justification between foun-

² Sosa (1980) is sometimes cited as a starting point for VE discourse. Zagzebski (1996) and Greco (1999) are other good sources. Zagzebski (2001), along with the other articles in that volume, provide a good entry into the literature.

dationalists and coherentists, and between internalists and externalists, has become a discourse with more than just justification in its sights. As is often the case with significant changes in methodology, the side effects on the disciplinary matrix were significant. Traditional epistemology is all about knowledge and justified belief, but there is more to our cognitive lives than simply believing and disbelieving discrete propositions. Just as there are moral but non-ethical values, so too, there are cognitive but non-epistemic states. Virtue epistemology, I believe, is perfectly situated to recognize, accommodate, and appreciate *cognitive but non-epistemic* values without having to flatten them into the standard epistemological categories. This is all to the good when it comes to thinking critically about critical thinking.

This point deserves to be emphasized because it provides the starting point for what I believe is an important, original, and compelling reason in favor of VE approaches. Traditional epistemologies ostensibly direct their attention to the general concept of *justification*, but what really attracts their attention is a narrower concept: the justification *of belief*. There are many other propositional attitudes we take, including doubting, considering, and supposing, which also can be justified or not. What is it, for example, that justifies considering some alternatives in decision-making processes but not others? Can we simply assume that it is the same kind of justification that justifies justified belief? Doubt presents a case with greater contrast: if there are beliefs that are innate, have squatters' rights, or come with a presumption in their favor, then it would be doubt rather than belief that would have to be justified in those contexts.³ Does doubt get justified in the same way as belief? Even if, in the end, we conclude that it does, that is a substantial thesis deserving its own supporting argumentation.

The importance of this in the big picture for epistemology is two-fold. First, it will allow us to provide a check on philosophy's methodological bias towards skepticism – the bias manifest in the recognition that, *prima facie*, everything is fair game for argument. We are taught to approach others' arguments with suspicion, with our guards up, apparently to make really

³ Harman (1984) argues in favor of according a presumption in favor of already accepted beliefs. That approach disarms some varieties of skepticism. Others, beginning at least with Bertrand Russell and continuing through to some evolutionary epistemologists, have thought this might be a way to deal with Hume's problem concerning the justification of induction.

sure that no one will ever be able to convince us of anything. And we seem to pass this on to some of our students, often the best ones. But surely there is something wrong with this picture!

The second point concerns cognitive states, accomplishments, and abilities that are not themselves reducible to propositional attitudes: are there justifications for them? Consider our moods, emotions, and feelings. We certainly do talk as if some of our feelings are justified and some are not. Even if feelings may be largely beyond our control, some of them are not. They are not so different from beliefs in this regard. And they are not so different when it comes to justification. Our critical thinking skills do not get put into blind escrow accounts when it comes to our emotional states.

One particular cognitive achievement that has attracted philosophical attention from time to time is *understanding*. One might have expected that understanding, especially insofar as it is not reducible to knowledge or justified belief, would be a central topic for philosophical investigation, but oddly, that has not been the case. Some kinds of understanding may be reducible to propositional knowledge. That may be true of scientific understanding, but the kind of understanding that applies to such things as persons and poems seems to be of a different sort.⁴ The latter achievement embodies different cognitive virtues than the former. They are virtues that critical thinking ought to help inculcate.

And then there is wisdom, the loftiest philosophical and cognitive achievement of all. Shouldn't epistemologists, argumentation theorists, and other philosophers have something to say about it?

The syllogism is patent: Values, attitudes, understandings, feelings and other cognitive states are things that can be justified. Justification involves argumentation. Thus, these are all things that can be argued for. Actually, there is a third premise, so I suppose it is really a sorites: Whatever can be argued for is subject to critical thinking. Therefore, critical thinking must be possible when it comes to cognitive states that are not epistemic, and to cognitions that are not thoughts in propositional form.

Virtue epistemology helps us see that there are questions to be asked about non-epistemic cognitive states and it helps us answer them. After all, we are cognitive agents as well as epistemological ones; we do more than

⁴ See, e.g., Kvanvig (2003, chapter 8), and Cohen (2006).

simply believe or disbelieve discrete true-or-false propositions, with varying degrees of commitment and justification. If epistemology is to make us better epistemological agents, or at the very least, help us to *understand* what it is to be a better epistemological agent, then it needs to consider everything that good epistemological agents do.

Arguing, of course, is one of the things we do as epistemological agents, but it is not the only thing. Argumentation is, however, undeniably central to such projects as inquiry and justification. Conversely, we become arguers for many reasons, not all of which are related to epistemological or even cognitive projects, but epistemic considerations never move very far from center stage.

2. Cognitive, critical and epistemic virtues:

The case of Open-mindedness

In order to bypass the debates as to exactly what sort of thing a virtue is, let us stipulate that argumentative or *critical* virtues are the acquired habits and skills that help us achieve the goals of critical thinking.⁵ Listening carefully, reasoning well, interpretive charity, and the ability to access and synthesize fields of information all stand as examples. Cognitive virtues are aids on the way to cognitive achievements; critical virtues are aids on the way to achievements in argumentation. Many of the virtues identified by virtue epistemology are virtues for arguers, and conversely. Analytic and inferential acumen, for example, are virtues with respect to many of our goals as epistemic agents as well as to our goals as participants in argumentation.

The traditional paradigm of a cognitive achievement is knowledge. Whatever is conducive to knowledge, then, would have at least a *prima facie* claim to counting as a cognitive virtue. Thus, inferential skill qualifies as a virtue due to its role in producing justifications, and to justifications' role in constituting knowledge from belief. That is why logic can appropriately be included in critical thinking courses. Insofar as having a good memory and keen powers of observation are conducive to knowledge, and insofar as

⁵ For suggested lists of epistemic virtues, see Zagzebski (1996); for a debate on the nature of epistemic virtues, see Zagzebski (2000, pp. 457ff), and Elfin (2003).

they can be developed and cultivated by practicing mnemonic and focusing techniques, they too could be epistemic virtues.

What are the critical virtues? Critical virtues can be defined by the goods that they help us procure and by the accomplishments that they help us achieve in the course of argumentation. That means we need to identify the positive goods that can be achieved by argumentation. Logic, rhetoric, and dialectic all have their own distinctive accomplishments: logical success is valid derivation; rhetorical success is rational persuasion; dialectical success is critically-achieved consensus. Arguments are more than just logical, rhetorical, and dialectical moments, however. There are other accomplishments to consider.

One important thing that we can accomplish by arguing is discharging our responsibilities as potential arguers. We have very specific obligations to argue if, for example, we are attorneys or politicians representing clients and constituencies, but I believe we also have general obligations to reason, argue, explain, and justify simply because we are rational beings who are members of linguistic communities. That thesis, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.

Additional examples of goods that can be brought about by argument, besides proof, persuasion, and resolution are not hard to find. They include:

- a deepened *understanding* of one's own position;
- *improvement* of one's position;
- *abandonment* of a standpoint for a better one, other than the opponent's;
- a deepened understanding of an *opponent's* position;
- *acknowledgement* of (the reasonableness of) another's position;
- greater *attention* to previously over-looked or under-valued details;
- better *grasp* of connections and how things might be fit together in a big picture.

These examples do not fit neatly into the logical, rhetorical, and dialectical categories, but each one represents an appreciable and positive cognitive change.

The cognitive gains above generally do not come about as the direct result of logical inference. Arguments effect cognitive changes in many ways. They

provide *reasons* for inferences to conclusions, of course, but that is only a part of it. They also act as *causes* for change. For example, arguments may upset its more confrontation-averse participants to the point that their judgments are clouded. Or they might positively energize and stimulate us to re-think and re-evaluate our beliefs more deeply. In addition, insofar as arguments are events in the world and in our lives, they can themselves be *data* and *evidence* to be incorporated into our world-views. I may, for example, infer from the mere fact that someone is arguing, rather than from the content of anything she says, that she is passionate about the subject matter and confident of her knowledge in the area.

In these examples, however, arguments mostly serve as occasions and catalysts for the cognitive changes that occur. It is not *qua* arguments that they bring about changes. Cognitive gains like these tend to occur over extended periods of time, sometimes long after the actual argument has ended. The participants and observers need a chance to reflect on what they said and what they could have said, as well as what they heard and what they could have heard.

There is one very important critical virtue on display in every one of my examples: *open-mindedness*. Part of open-mindedness is the ability to listen carefully, the willingness to take what others say seriously, and, if called for, the resolve to adopt them as one's own.⁶ That is the part that most textbooks on critical thinking note. There is another, complementary part, however. Open-mindedness has to include the willingness, ability, and resolve to re-examine one's own beliefs and, if called for, to let them go. Belief revision is not just a matter of belief-acquisition; it also involves belief modification and even belief rejection.

In order to identify the ways that open-mindedness is an important virtue for arguers specifically, it will help to contrast open-mindedness as a critical virtue with its status as a cognitive virtue and, especially, its status as an epistemic virtue. The key contrast is that while open-mindedness is almost

⁶ As Hare (2003) emphasizes, the crucial feature in an adequate definition of open-mindedness is the willingness to entertain objections and, if appropriate, revise one's positions. In the relevant sense, this concerns how beliefs are managed rather than their content.

uniformly a cognitive virtue, *open-mindedness is not always or necessarily an epistemic virtue!*

Because others have argued so well for the value of open-mindedness as a cognitive virtue, it will not be rehearsed here.⁷ It will suffice to note out that it plays crucial roles in interpretation, in education (both learning and teaching), in communication, and in gaining understanding. Instead, I will consider, first, the ways in which open-mindedness fails to contribute, or even detracts from the principle epistemic project, successful knowledge acquisition, and second, the ways in which it succeeds in contributing to argumentation.

At the risk of overstating the case that open-mindedness should *not* be counted as an epistemic virtue, we can point to a variety of circumstances in which open-mindedness can be detrimental to the pursuit of knowledge. Open-mindedness puts our beliefs on the table for discussion. Even though open-mindedness is consistent with strong commitment to our beliefs, simply allowing that they be up for discussion calls them into question – and calling beliefs into question, even ones that are well-justified, runs the risk of losing them. Open-mindedness, then, is most important for people whose beliefs are mostly unjustified or wrong. For people whose beliefs are mostly in order, however, it is epistemologically risky, unnecessary, and unwise. It will lead away from justified beliefs. In the limiting case – an omniscient being in possession of all and only true beliefs – open-mindedness could not have any beneficial effects.⁸ For omniscient beings, nothing would be gained by keeping an open mind.

We are not omniscient beings, of course, but what this shows is that, if virtues are understood as character traits with the propensity to increase positive outcomes, then whether or not open-mindedness is an epistemic virtue is highly contingent upon certain empirical facts about humans as epistemic agents. For example, if Donald Davidson is correct that we have to assume that by and large our world-view is fact-based, so that we are mostly

⁷ Hare (1985) may be the best point of entry into the literature. Gardner (1996) and Hare (2003) offer a nice dialectical exchange on the subject.

⁸ Miler and Cohen (2008) identify and argue for the occasional and situation-relative merits of closed-mindedness.

right about most of our beliefs, then the epistemic value of keeping an open mind is actually quite circumscribed.⁹ Similarly, if the reasoning we use in evaluating reasons for and against a candidate for belief is generally more like *post hoc* rationalization rather than unprejudiced deliberation, and thus no more reliable than our initial belief-acquiring methods, then whether and to what extent open-mindedness is a “virtue” will vary greatly from individual to individual and from situation to situation.¹⁰ By that same token, if Malcolm Gladwell is right in claiming that we our first impressions are often more trustworthy than our later reflective judgments, the willingness to revise our beliefs might in fact be more negative than positive.¹¹

Nothing that has been said should be read as implying that open-mindedness is never a positive epistemic trait. In designing an ideal inquirer, open-mindedness would feature prominently. Its value, however, is dependent on context and situation. It is more valuable locally than globally, for example. Applied globally and without any sense of proportion, it leads to skepticism. The willingness to entertain everything entails entertaining such possible defeaters for justifications as dreams and evil demons and alternative conceptual schemes. But to entertain these scenarios even just as possibilities already gives them all the footholds they need. The result, skepticism, is tantamount to a complete loss of knowledge and a disastrous end to that epistemic project.¹² Similarly, the value of open-mindedness might depend on the characters of others in the community. For example, a scientific research team might be well-served by consisting mostly of open-minded members, but the presence of an unduly tenacious member could be catalytic in a number of different ways.¹³

What these considerations point to is when it comes to the pursuit of knowledge, the value of being open-minded is a contingent matter. But isn't

⁹ I take this to be the result of applying the argument from Davidson (1974) on the interdependence of belief and meaning to our own beliefs. The interpretative imperative is to interpret *another's* utterances and beliefs as largely true, meaning in agreement with what believe about the world – and thus to take our own as mostly true.

¹⁰ Kornblith (1999, 2010) carefully explores these possibilities.

¹¹ This is the thesis of Gladwell (2007).

¹² There are other epistemic projects apart from the quest for certain knowledge, such as maximizing coherence, reaching reflective equilibrium, and increasing justification, so skepticism does not have to be an end to our epistemic lives.

¹³ Miller and Cohen (2008) explore and develop several different scenarios involving valuable closed-minded members on research teams.

it *a priori* that being open-minded is intellectually more virtuous than being closed-minded? If it is, and I do think that that is the case, then it is so because there is more to open-mindedness than its role in epistemic pursuits.

What makes open-mindedness an important argumentative virtue, independent of its status as an epistemic virtue, is that closed-mindedness is an almost insuperable obstacle to the realization of any of the cognitive benefits of arguments listed above. While effective dialectical engagement of any sort obviously requires the ability to understand opponents' positions and objections, *sincere* engagement is necessary to achieve those gains. If all one is doing is merely listening to objections, but with the door closed on the possibility of actually revising one's standpoint as a result of them, then one might still produce a "good" argument – in the sense that it could be logical, effective, and so on – but it would not be a good argument as measured by what one takes from it. Winning the contested point is not the only thing that counts.

The war-metaphor and most agonistic models of argumentation share one dramatic failing: they foist off on us a very distorted understanding of arguments insofar as they count the arguers who come away from arguments having learned something new – that is, arguers who have acquired new, well-justified and closely-examined beliefs – as the "losers" of the argument. And it involves the same distortion when those who convince others are called the "winners" even when their own standpoints have not benefited in any way from having argued. An argument that is devoid of any good consequences for its protagonist should not be held up as an example of argumentation at its best.

When it comes our more general cognitive and critical projects, open-mindedness seems to be valuable across the board. It plays a pivotal role in all of the examples I offered of positive cognitive gains resulting from argument that were more than logical, rhetorical, or dialectical.

3. A Sense of Proportion

Although it is a necessary precondition for getting the most out of our arguments, open-mindedness can also be a counterproductive trait of mind in argumentation. The problem is that arguments are open-ended in a number

of different ways with the potential to be extended *ad infinitum*. Open-mindedness exacerbates matters. It needs the counterbalance provided by a sense of proportion.

First, the range of possible new objections that can be raised in an argument is limited mostly by our own imaginations. While we do want to keep an open-mind about such things, it would be intellectually paralyzing to try to give every objection a full hearing, no matter the provenance and regardless of how frivolous it might initially appear. Similarly, in non-deductive contexts, the epitome of the arguable, there is always the possibility of relevant, perhaps even decisive, new evidence. We want to keep an open-mind here too, but we cannot let it stymie us as we wait for it. Further, because everything is fair game for arguments, the implicitly accepted rules governing any particular argument can be made explicit and put on the table for discussion. Arguers always have the option of going “meta”. This strategy may be abused often more often than not, either as a delaying tactic or a red herring, but there are also clear examples of its legitimate use.¹⁴ Without a brake on our willingness to listen to reasons to reconsider our beliefs, we open ourselves up to endless filibusters.

As a virtue, open-mindedness fits into the Aristotelian mold of a mean between extremes. It is possible to be too open-minded. What is needed to complement and rein in open-mindedness is a sense of proportion. In the quest for knowledge and trying to make sense of the world, a sense of proportion provides the perspective that enables us to choose and pursue our epistemic projects effectively. In arguments, it gives us license to ignore apparently frivolous and irrelevant objections. It is a virtue for many contexts.

For all its value, proportionality is a peculiar sort of virtue. It is unlike open-mindedness in that it does not fit comfortably into the Aristotelian pattern as a mean between two extremes. (Is it possible to have too much of a sense of proportion about things?) In that regard, it is something of a meta-virtue, perhaps like Platonic moderation: it operates to regulate other virtues. However, it is like open-mindedness in that a sense of proportion as a *cognitive* virtue can be at odds with its status as an *epistemic* virtue. Like open-mindedness, a healthy sense of proportion can get in the way of the acquisition of knowledge.

¹⁴ See Cohen (2004, chapter 6).

Consider the so-called “telephone book problem”. As epistemic agents, we seek to acquire knowledge. Why, then, when we are waiting in the doctor’s office, don’t we simply pick up and start memorizing the numbers in a telephone directory that is on the table in front of us? Whether it is telephone numbers, sports statistics, historical minutiae, or trivia of some other sort, there is an inexhaustible supply of easily acquired true beliefs, complete with justification, simply available for the taking!¹⁵

There is an obvious answer: the ability to attach phone numbers to names and addresses or sports statistics to particular athletes may qualify as knowledge, but not particularly *valuable* knowledge. What piques and satisfies one person’s curiosity is another’s useless trivia. Easy as it may be, it is still not worth it. With apologies to Aristotle, we need to admit that mere knowledge in and of itself does not really have all that much intrinsic value. What may not be as obvious is that in our recourse to values in explaining this epistemic phenomenon, we are implicitly acknowledging that the fundamental epistemic project –the pursuit of knowledge– needs to be balanced against the rest of our cognitive projects and our other life-projects. A sense of proportion about our epistemic projects will often cut against that particular epistemic grain. It can actually prevent us from acquiring more knowledge. Of course, the knowledge that it prevents us from getting is mostly useless clutter of the sort that can be easily accessed when needed, so it is best left in the book on the table.¹⁶ This may all be obvious, but it reminds us of the larger cognitive context for epistemology.

It is as a critical virtue for arguers that a sense of proportion may have its greatest value, especially in relation to the ways in which arguments are open-ended. One of the problems cited earlier concerned the persistent possibility of objections. In practice, major objections are raised right away

¹⁵ There are two distinct problems here. One concerns the value of having true rather than false beliefs. The other concerns the value of knowledge over and above the value of simply having true beliefs. Kvanvig (2003) gives an excellent treatment of these problems. The true beliefs that can be acquired from telephone books would normally count as knowledge.

¹⁶ An alternative reading would allow that a sense of proportion counts as an unqualified epistemic virtue, in that it takes into account our cognitive limitations: memorizing the phone books would use up too much of our memory capacity, forcing out other beliefs. Rather than working against the acquisition of knowledge, it enhances it. Thus, its status as a virtue in a narrow and strictly epistemological sense would be uncompromised. Is that really the reason why we do not memorize random facts that pass our notice?

with the sequence of objections degenerating into the trivial. With a sense of proportion about the relative significance of objections, we will neither give frivolous objections more attention than they deserve nor engage in such quibbling ourselves. Not every objection deserves a response. Conversely, just as there may be an endless array of pointless arguments against a position, there can be pointless arguments for a position: if the opponents have ceded the point, it is beating a dead horse to continue offering reasons. Not every argument deserves to be presented. The same perspective applies on a larger scale: there are differences that are too minor to be the focus of a critical discussion. Not every disagreement deserves an argument. Even great disagreements over weighty issues need not be the occasion for argument, if the dissent comes from someone mad, excessively dogmatic or insistent, or unreasoning some other way. Not every voice deserves to be engaged as an opponent in argument.

Conclusions

Argumentation has many roles in our intellectual lives, and we fill many roles as arguers. How successful we are when we argue is largely a function of the character traits and habits of mind that we bring to bear. Without a sufficiently open mind, we close ourselves off from many of the valuable gains that can come from arguing. With too open a mind, we become vulnerable to the kind of unreasonable and endless argument that can degenerate into a pathological skepticism. The sense of proportion that stands us in such good stead in other matters of our lives is no less important in epistemological matters, including, prominently, argumentation.

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