Section 8

Virtuous Adversariality: Exploring Virtues in Philosophical Practice

Organizer: Catarina Dutilh-Novaes (University of Groningen)
Participants: Andrew Aberdein (Florida Institute of Technology), Mathew Duncome (University of Nottingham), James Kidd (University of Nottingham)

Abstract:

This symposium explores a normative ideal of philosophical practice that we dub 'virtuous adversariality', drawing on the resources of social and virtue epistemology, ancient Greek philosophy, and argumentation theory. The ideal relies on the familiar conception of philosophy as a form of disciplined intellectual practice organized around dialogical engagement between two or more interlocutors. Its key feature is the idea that a certain form of adversariality, more specifically disagreement and debate, is indeed at the heart of philosophy, but that philosophical inquiry also has a strong cooperative, virtuous component that regulates and constrains the adversarial component. Such virtuous adversariality would preserve the epistemic power of adversariality, but ensure that it does not lapse into epistemically and socially counterproductive competitive, agonistic 'bloodbaths'.

Titles and Abstracts of the talks

1.
Andrew Aberdein: Courage as a virtue of argument
Courage is a paradigm moral virtue. Intellectual courage has been studied as an epistemic virtue. But is courage a virtue of argument? `Courageous argument' can be a euphemism for `indefensible argument', and misplaced appeals to argumentative courage have been offered as excuses for needless aggression. This paper defends courage as a virtue of argument. Not only is courage essential to the defence of unpopular views, it is also necessary for the proper acknowledgement of defeat. The latter aspect challenges a popular analysis (King 2014, Battaly 2017) of intellectual courage in terms of perseverance.

2.
Matthew Duncombe: Orphaned Arguments and Refutation
Philosophers often refute a position, abstracted from any particular defence of that position. This separation is often thought a good thing, if not in itself, at least if used correctly. So it is surprising that Plato holds this separation to be vicious. In the *Theaetetus* and *Phaedrus*, Plato calls positions abstracted from their defenders 'orphaned arguments'. They lack a committed 'parent', an actual agent in the dialectical encounter, who defends them. This paper argues that two obvious explanations of Plato's attitude are inadequate. I go on to explain that attacking an orphaned argument is vicious because, for Plato and Aristotle, refutation requires an explicit or tacit agreement as to what will count as a successful refutation.

3.

Catarina Dutilh Novaes: Metaphors for argumentation

Argumentation is very often conceived as a form of battle; as the title of an influential piece by D. Cohen (1996) summarizes, 'Argument is war… and war is hell!' This conceptualization of argumentation, while still widely held, has also been forcefully criticized in particular by feminist writers. But if argumentation is not war, what is it then? In this talk, I explore alternative metaphors/conceptualizations for argumentation, as well as their implications for philosophical practice. I discuss in particular the well-known argumentation-as-therapy metaphor, and a novel argumentation-as-social-exchange metaphor, which I am currently developing.

4.

Ian James Kidd: Appraising Metaphors for Philosophical Practice

I propose a virtue-based strategy for appraising metaphors for philosophical practice. Metaphors exploit structural associations between philosophising and other activities – like combat – and s *implicitly specific* character traits, whether virtues or vices. But good metaphors are rich enough to specify a range of traits, so attention should be directed at the ways that those metaphors are 'unpacked'. I show that ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphors can specify a set of virtues, as well as the vices that critics usually point to. If so, criticism should be directed at the ways we unpack and interpret such metaphors, not at the metaphors themselves.