Arrogance and Deep Disagreement

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Arrogance and Polarisation in Debate: Changing Attitudes in Public Discourse
Cardiff University, November 6, 2017
Outline

Virtues of Argument

Deep Disagreement

Arrogance

Courage and/or Perseverance

Conclusions
Winning an argument never **feels** like winning
Virtues of Argument
Daniel Cohen

Deaf dogmatist
↑
Willingness to
Listen/Modify
↓
Concessionaire

↑
Eager Believer
Willingness to
Question
↓
Unassuring
Assurer

↓
Quietism
Willingness to
Engage
↓
Argument
Provocateur

A tentative typology of argumentational virtue

1. willingness to engage in argumentation
   1.1 being communicative
   1.2 faith in reason
   1.3 intellectual courage
      1.3.1 sense of duty

2. willingness to listen to others
   2.1 intellectual empathy
      2.1.1 insight into persons
      2.1.2 insight into problems
      2.1.3 insight into theories
   2.2 fairmindedness
      2.2.1 justice
      2.2.2 fairness in evaluating the arguments of others
      2.2.3 open-mindedness in collecting and appraising evidence
   2.3 recognition of reliable authority
   2.4 recognition of salient facts
      2.4.1 sensitivity to detail

3. willingness to modify one’s own position
   3.1 common sense
   3.2 intellectual candour
   3.3 intellectual humility
   3.4 intellectual integrity
      3.4.1 honour
      3.4.2 responsibility
      3.4.3 sincerity

4. willingness to question the obvious
   4.1 appropriate respect for public opinion
   4.2 autonomy
   4.3 intellectual perseverance
      4.3.1 diligence
      4.3.2 care
      4.3.3 thoroughness

Andrew Aberdein, 2010, Virtue in argument. *Argumentation*, 24(2)
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A disagreement can be intense without being deep. A disagreement can also be unresolvable without being deep. I can argue myself blue in the face trying to convince you of something without succeeding. The explanation might be that one of us is dense or pig-headed. And this is a matter that could be established beyond doubt to, say, an impartial spectator. But we get a very different sort of disagreement when it proceeds from a clash in underlying principles. Under these circumstances, the parties may be unbiased, free of prejudice, consistent, coherent, precise and rigorous, yet still disagree. And disagree profoundly, not just marginally. Now when I speak about underlying principles, I am thinking about what others (Putnam) have called framework propositions or what Wittgenstein was inclined to call rules. We get a deep disagreement when the argument is generated by a clash of framework propositions.

Robert J. Fogelin, 1985, The logic of deep disagreements. *Informal Logic*, 7(1)
Fogelin (& Wittgenstein) on Deep Disagreement

Claiming that deep disagreements exist does not mean that they are common. And again, a disagreement can be heated without being deep. But if deep disagreements can arise, what rational procedures can be used for their resolution? The drift of this discussion leads to the answer NONE.

Robert J. Fogelin, 1985, The logic of deep disagreements. *Informal Logic, 7*(1)

Wittgenstein on Persuasion

I said I would ‘combat’ the other man—but wouldn’t I give him reasons? Certainly; but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes persuasion. (Think what happens when missionaries convert natives.)

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People whose forms of life, and their attendant Weltbild, do not sufficiently intersect cannot disagree—not even deeply. As such, as much as such differences cannot rationally be repaired, it is no failure of rationality or rational argumentation that it cannot span a gulf which language itself cannot traverse. . . . Meaningful deep disagreements seem to occur either at the intersection of two different but overlapping forms of life, or within a single but heterogenous Weltbild, where different, similar but incompatible language games are in play.

Emo Philips on Deep Disagreement?

Once I saw this guy on a bridge about to jump. I said, “Don’t do it!” He said, “Nobody loves me.” I said, “God loves you. Do you believe in God?”


He said, “Northern Conservative Baptist.” I said, “Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?” He said, “Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region.” I said, “Me, too!”


Emo Philips, 2005, The best God joke ever – and it’s mine!

*The Guardian*, Thursday 29 September
Prominence/Drop

The prominence of a peak is the height of the peak’s summit above the lowest contour line encircling it but containing no higher summit within it.
“Don’t give in to misology,” Socrates tells us, “we are not truly lost until we give up on argument—keep trying.” If we take Socrates to mean that we should never stop producing reasons, never recognize that some gaps are too large to close with reasons, then, if there are deep disagreements, we have to recognize it as very bad advice. It’s bad in two ways. First, it will lead us, if it leads us anywhere, to conclusions, and then actions, that have no appropriate connection to our understanding. Second, it will seriously harm our reasoning skills.

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Alessandra Tanesini on Arrogance

The speaker is attempting to vouch for the propriety of his purported assertions merely on the grounds that they are his claims, without taking himself to be accountable to anyone else. The speaker does not wish to imply that his mere saying so makes the content of the assertion true, but he is convinced that the mere fact that the assertion is his somehow secures its correctness. However, unless one takes oneself to be infallible, the only way in which an assertion could be guaranteed to be correct simply because one has made it is if one delusively (and usually non-consciously) believes that one’s asserting that things are so makes them so.

Alessandra Tanesini, 2016, “Calm down, dear”: Intellectual arrogance, silencing and ignorance, Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume, 90
There is a difference between haughtiness and arrogance. The first is manifested as disrespect toward other speakers; the second is an unwillingness to submit oneself to the norms governing ordinary conversation and rational debate. Despite their different natures, these putative vices are related and often go hand in hand. I suspect that haughty people will often manifest arrogant tendencies, and vice versa. Nevertheless, it seems at least possible for someone to have become so arrogant that he does not relate to other epistemic agents at all, not even to show disdain towards them. Conversely, it also seems possible for someone to have nothing but contempt for all other epistemic agents without being so arrogant to presume that his saying so makes it so.

Maura Priest on Humility
An interpersonal (anti-asshole) account

Aaron James on Assholes

a person counts as an asshole when, and only when, he systematically allows himself to enjoy special advantages in interpersonal relations out of an entrenched sense of entitlement that immunizes him against the complaints of other people.


a person is intellectually humble just in case he:

▶ Respects the intellect of others as his own, and so rarely feels immune to their complaints and criticisms.

▶ Systematically declines intellectual advantages in interpersonal relations because he feels no sense of entitlement.

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Maura Priest on Arrogance

We see that for conceptual purposes, intellectual arrogance is grounded upon disregard for intellectual autonomy. Behaviors commonly associated with this disregard include deception and manipulation. In an important sense manipulators and deceivers attempt to control. Salient examples are found in cults and extremist political parties. These groups not only disregard intellectual autonomy, they act to undermine it via engagement in the following:

(1) Attempt to manipulate persons into holding certain beliefs (truth need not matter).
(2) Will try to achieve (1) regardless of the evidence.
(3) Will try to achieve (1) without concern for the intellectual process of manipulated agents.

To give uptake rightly, then, it is not enough simply to receive another’s speech act with the conventional understanding. One must appreciate and respond to the spirit in which something is expressed, and one must take seriously what the speaker is trying to say and the speaker’s reasons for saying it. One must have the appropriate emotional and intellectual responses, engaging one’s whole heart. Furthermore, one must recognize the responsibility attending social and political privilege. Indeed, giving uptake properly is partly constitutive of the kind of person one is—it requires cultivation of a certain kind of character.

We found that both liberals and conservatives composed persuasive messages that reflected their own moral values, not values unique to those who typically would oppose the political stance (Studies 1 and 2). Furthermore, these moral messages framed in a manner consistent with the moral values of those already supporting the political stance were less persuasive than moral arguments reframed to appeal to the values of the intended audience—those who typically oppose the political position that the messenger is arguing in favor of (Studies 3-6).

Matthew Feinberg & Robb Willer, 2015,
From gulf to bridge: When do moral arguments facilitate political influence?
*Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 41*(12)
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Heather Battaly on Intellectual Perseverance

In sum, given that these four views [Montmarquet, Zagzebski, Baehr, Roberts & Wood] are on the right track, we have a prima facie case for thinking of the virtue of intellectual courage as a sub-set of the more general virtue of intellectual perseverance.

My proposal is that it involves dispositions:

1. to make good judgments about one’s intellectual goals;
2. to reliably perceive obstacles to one’s intellectual goals;
3. to respond to obstacles with the appropriate degree of confidence and calmness;
4. to overcome obstacles, or otherwise act as the context demands; and
5. to do so because one cares appropriately about epistemic goods.

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Character virtues are not canned responses. Agents with the character virtue of IP don’t always behave in the same way. They typically and characteristically overcome obstacles to their intellectual goals. But they also give up, in the face of obstacles, when it is appropriate to do so. In short, they respond to obstacles, as appropriate, in the given context. To put the point differently, there is a sense in which agents with the character virtue of IP hit the mean in their actions. The character virtue of IP lies in something like a mean between a vice of excess—call it recalcitrance—and a vice of deficiency—capitulation.

The Argument Provocateur is someone with whom you invariably end up arguing. He or she is someone who has an uncanny knack for drawing you into an argument. Even when you agree with an argument provocateur, you end up arguing.

In some circumstances, arguing is bad form. If we are too sensitive to that, we can become ... gun shy about arguing. Argument Provocateurs are not gun shy about arguing. Nor are they deferential about including sacred cows in their gun-sights.

Daniel Cohen’s Argument Provocateur

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Maimonides suggests that there are two extreme approaches to handling secret matters, both of which are deficient: the cowardly and the rash approaches to writing. . . . Maimonides advocates that the correct approach is a form of courageous writing, just as courage is the proper mean between cowardice and rashness. This is writing through parables and hints that have a meaning both for the ordinary reader, which will not lead him astray, and a separate meaning for the philosophic reader, who can read between the lines and learn the secrets from these parables and hints.

Alexander Green, 2015, Maimonides on courage. *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 22(2).
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- Arrogance can deepen disagreements.
- Arrogance impedes disagreement amelioration strategies.
- Courage + persistence is essential to the defence of unpopular views.
- Courage – persistence is essential for the proper acknowledgement of defeat.
- Disagreement amelioration strategies require close attention to virtues of argument.
- The virtues of argument may ease the way to mutually acceptable resolution.
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