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# Academic arguments

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**ABSTRACT:** Calling an argument “merely academic” impugns its seriousness, belittles its substance, dismisses its importance, and deflates hope of resolution, while ruling out negotiation and compromise. However, “purely academic” argumentation, as an idealized limit case, is a valuable analytical tool for argumentation theorists because while the *telos* of academic argumentation may be cognitive, it is cognitive in the service of a community, which, in turn, is a community in the service of the cognitive.

**KEYWORDS:** argument, argumentativeness, cognitive communities, rationality.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

To label an argument as “merely academic” is to impugn its seriousness and to dismiss it as having no real effect. Real arguments, it is implied, resolve issues that matter. They have tangible consequences that directly result in decisions or actions or, if not, then indirectly by way of principles that can determine entire courses of action. Academic arguments, to borrow a felicitous Austinian phrase, have “minimal perlocutionary effect.” Their concern is what to believe, rather than what to do, in esoteric areas where beliefs are disengaged from actions. There is in sum, no real point to academic arguments.

Or so the story goes.

Of course, there is always a point to an academic argument. It’s just not always as obvious as it is in arguments about whether adulterers should be stoned, whether marginal tax rates should be lowered, or whose turn it is to wash the dishes. In practice, even the most academic of arguments involve actual people whose lives are complex tapestries of personal, professional, cognitive, emotional, financial, and many other strands, every one of which may contribute its own motive for arguing.

What about a *purely* academic argument, if such an idealization can be brought into focus for analytic investigation? Would there be a point to such an argument and would it be possible to identify it? Why would such conflict-resolution strategies as negotiation and compromise be inappropriate for these arguments? What does that reveal about argumentation in general? The fact that we do engage in academic argumentation is a puzzling phenomenon. It is worthy of investigation.

This investigation should not be taken as proposing a privileged place for academic arguments. Complementary analyses can, and should, be undertaken for all the outlying, extreme, bizarre, and limiting cases of argument for the light they can shed on argumentation itself. The possibilities and varieties are innumerable: arguing with oneself, arguing with the weather, arguing with God, arguing when there is little or no difference in standpoint, recreational argumentation, excessively adamant argumentation, intentionally losing

argumentation, backfiring arguments that do their cause disservice, arguments before incompetent juries, deliberately bad arguments, and extremely protracted or abruptly curtailed arguments. Learning about any of them contributes to knowledge of the whole.

I will lay my cards on the table right at the outset. Even the most purely academic arguments are justified. The point of such argumentation may be nominally cognitive but the greater component is ethical. We are subject to a standing imperative to argue: THOU SHALT ARGUE! The source of this commandment is our membership in cognitive communities, so the point of academic arguments is cognitive in the service of community. It is how we manifest our membership in and fulfill our duties to that community.

On the other hand, we are often subject to another, countervailing imperative, viz., THOU SHALT NOT ARGUE! We violate this imperative not when we argue badly, e.g., by committing a logical fallacy, a rhetorical blunder, or some other sort of mistake in argument, but when the argument itself is a mistake. The error is not in *how* we argue but in the fact *that* we argue. The greatest factor behind this imperative is also ethical, and even moral.

It is only against the background of these conflicting imperatives that sense can be made of purely academic arguments.

## 2. MISSING AND MISBEGOTTEN ARGUMENTS

Let me begin by introducing a pair of concepts to frame the discussion: the ideas of missing arguments and misbegotten arguments. To complement those, we need also need the ideas of reasons and excluders for arguments.

*Missing Arguments* are just that: arguments that should be made but are not. A lawyer who does not argue for her client or a representative who does not argue for his constituents is guilty of a sin of omission. And, to cite a notorious example, shouldn't Abraham have argued on behalf of his own son Isaac? After all, we know from his earlier challenge to God on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah that he was perfectly willing to take on God in argument, so if he does not argue here, on behalf of his son, he would owe Isaac an explanation why he was silent. And he would also owe an explanation to Sarah. Now, I am willing to us suppose that Abraham had some satisfactory justification for his silence: a host of commentators have supposed so, and there are volumes of speculation as to what it might be. The salient point to note here, however, is that regardless of what Abraham's justification may have been, the mere fact that one is wanted implies that in the absence of an excuse, Abraham ought to have argued. (Cohen 2004: Chapter 1.)

These examples are not isolated outliers. Many occasions positively call for an argument. Unless there are reasons not to argue—as, of course, there very often are—there is a standing obligation on us as rational beings to challenge any false, unwarranted, unfair, or offensive claim.

The counterpart concept to Missing Arguments is the idea of *Misbegotten Arguments*, arguments that shouldn't take place at all, but do. The time and place might be wrong. For example, it would be an argumentative mistake—but not exactly a fallacy—to object to comments during a eulogy at a funeral. No matter how cogent the argument would be, it should not be. Similarly, after a group decision has been made, the time for arguing is past. Alternatively, the subject matter can be wrong. I'm not sure about the received wisdom that *de gustibus non est disputandum*, but I will allow that from the arguers' perspective trivial matters are often not worth arguing about. And some things just

might not be worthy of an argument at all, from any perspective. In addition, the *arguers* themselves might be wrong. If none of the parties has any knowledge of the subject, it might be better not to have the argument. Or, to import a legal concept that I believe deserves some attention in argumentation theory, the arguers might lack the proper *standing* to make the case. The spectators in the gallery at a meeting of a legislative body do not have the standing to enter into parliamentary debates.

*Now is not the time; This isn't something to argue about; and Who are you to argue about this?* These are all comments with recognizably legitimate uses as critiques of arguments. None of them, it is worth noting and keeping in mind, charges a fallacy or impugns the cogency of the arguments.

Let us acknowledge, then, that there are indeed misbegotten arguments, arguments that should not have come to be. Still, there is the temptation to think that just about everything is fair game for argument. We can argue about the answers to unanswerable questions, resolutions to irresolvable matters, things beyond our control, and the most trivial of minutiae. (As a philosopher, I deeply appreciate this fact.) We do not need much of an excuse to argue, but sometimes we seem to need some excuse, or, if not an excuse, then at least an answer to the question, “Why are you arguing?” Answers to this question are *reasons for* an argument, which are very different from the reasons that are offered *in* an argument. There are several different ways to cash out the reasons for arguing. We can refer to motives, causes, justifications, or any combination thereof, depending on the kind of explanation wanted. All of them work.

On the other hand, the fact that every difference of standpoint can be elevated into a dispute does not mean that every one should be. There are, as we noted, all sorts of reasons against arguing—call them “*excluders*”—just as there can be reasons for arguing.

### 3. BURIDAN'S ARGUER

Given a difference in standpoint, then a complete absence of excluders would mean that any reason at all for arguing, no matter how slight, would suffice. Conversely, the presence of a difference and a complete absence of reasons for arguing would mean that any excluder, no matter how slight, would tip the balance in the other direction.

What about a situation devoid of both reasons and excluders? If that were possible, there would be no imperative to argue and no imperative to refrain. Would that put us in a position like Buridan's Ass, that perfectly rational animal who, as the protagonist of a thought-experiment, starved to death when situated exactly midway between two bales of hay for want of a reason to choose either bale over the other?

Fortunately, or perhaps not, our situation differs from the imagined donkey's in important ways. That scenario cannot happen. For one thing, the decision to argue or refrain is logically “forced” in William James' sense. Postponing the decision is a form of not-arguing, and thus a decision. Choosing a bale of hay is forced by hunger and biological imperatives, not logic. What is more relevant here is that while there can be a balance of reasons for and against arguing, in the presence of a difference of opinion, there can never be a complete absence of reasons.

The reason why there cannot be an absence of reasons for argument concerns the relevant concept of rationality. The thought-experiment involving Buridan's Ass makes its point by using a distorted “idealization” of what it is to be rational. First, it ignores the princi-

ple of meta-rationality. Second, it conflates the non-rational with the irrational. And third, it implicates a metaphysics that individuates actions according to their contingent descriptions.

The principle of meta-rationality recognizes the special self-referential aspect of rationality: part of what it is to be rational is to think about what it is to be rational. That is something Buridan's Ass does not do. Otherwise, it would not let the calculations of its reason become so dominant as to lead to its own starvation.

There are a couple of ways to think about this. Focusing on reasons and actions brings a contradiction to light. By hypothesis, the rational donkey only does things for which it has sufficient reason, and it does not have sufficient reason to prefer either bale over the other. So, what it does is starve. But if that is what it does, wouldn't it need sufficient reason for starving itself—which it does not have? There is something fishy going on. The story is incoherent.

An obvious objection to this analysis is that the animal did not positively choose to starve itself as an act; what it did was fail to choose. Starving itself was a non-action, not an action. But that rubs against the implicit individuation of actions by their descriptions. The donkey does have sufficient reason to choose the bale of hay on the left; and equally sufficient reason to choose the other. What it does not have are sufficient reasons to prefer the left, i.e., to choose the left over the right (and vice-versa). How does the act of going-to-the-bale-on-the-left differ from the act of going-to-the-bale-on-the-left-instead-of-the-one-on-the-right? The choices may be different, depending on the intentional state of the agent. And the presence of the intention would be grounds for differentiating the actions, without implying that they constitute different events. The dilemma for the donkey is that it is aware of the both bales and cannot ignore one bale in order to choose the other. But that same line of reasoning would differentiate the two actions of failing to come to a decision and deciding to starve oneself—because meta-rationality forces rational agents to bring that difference into intentional focus, thereby making the non-action an action.

Alternatively, the same knot can be reached by focusing on the difference between the irrational and the non-rational. Several distinctions get lost here. We can distinguish acting only with sufficient reason from never acting against reason, but we can also distinguish both of them from never acting without sufficient reason. Acting against reason is irrational; it is in the realm of the rationally forbidden, what you are obligated not to do. Acting without reason may not be rational in the narrow, first sense, but it need not be irrational; it is the realm of the un-mandated, i.e., what you have no obligation to do. If perfect rationality is taken to mean never acting against reason, rather than only acting with reason, then choosing the bale on the left would indeed be rational—and so would choosing the one on the left over the one on the right. Both can be rational because neither is irrational.

[In the language of modal logic, we can say that Buridan's Ass violates the deontic version of one of the Barcan Formulas: the donkey ought to choose one of the bales, even though there is no bale that it ought to choose.]

Above all else, the Buridan's Ass thought-experiment suppresses a crucial component of the concept of rationality: Rationality is a "thick" concept that has normative force as well as descriptive content. Being rational is not just a matter of processing the available information. Computers with deduction programs are not rational beings. Rationality carries with it positive imperatives and obligations to seek out information. As Aristotle told us, rational animals by their natures desire to know.

To put this into the framework at hand, we can say that in the absence of all external reasons for argument and all excluders, there is still an internal drive to know, and when the conditions are right, that rational impulse provides a reason to initiate an argument. Other things being equal, or equally absent, the default is that we should argue.

#### 4. ACADEMIC ARGUMENTS AND ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES

We are now in a position to characterize those reputedly pointless academic arguments. As a first attempt we might say that an argument is “purely academic” when there are no apparent reasons for entering into it other than the minimal imperative to argue. Since any reason at all will suffice in the absence of excluders, just the barest imperative of reason will do.

As a first pass, this description has some merit. It properly omits excluders from the characterization and it offers an explanation of how the balance gets tipped. But it won't do as a final accounting because it does not cover enough ground and it gets some of the ground it does cover wrong. It does not give the imperatives of reason enough credit: their force is sufficient to overcome even some formidable excluders—and there are some excluders that are particularly endemic to academic arguments. But it also gives the rational imperative to inquire after knowledge too much credit by reading it as an imperative to argue. Argument and inquiry are closely related but they are not twins, not even fraternal twins.

There are some very peculiar features to academic argumentation that are missed by looking exclusively at its origins in terms of reasons and excluders. For example, it is a striking fact about purely academic arguments that they rarely reach resolution. If this is more true of academic arguments in philosophy, that merely emphasizes that irrelevance is an especially dangerous occupational hazard to watch out for among the excesses of abstraction. However, the problem is not just that resolution is rare, it's that resolution is neither expected nor necessary. Does anyone arguing for an anti-realist position really think she will convert her realist colleagues and end the debate? Given the lengths to which academics will go to avoid it, it is not at all clear that resolution of their disputes is really wanted or desirable. The end of academic arguments would be the end of academe. We need to explain why the strategies of negotiation and compromise are given no opening, why coalition-building has no traction, and why temporizing and filibustering are utterly inappropriate, despite the lack of any urgency. An appeal to mind-independent truth—and therefore also argument-independent truth—as the end of academic inquiry does have a certain appeal, but whether that begs the question, when the subject is truth itself, or applies to argumentation in areas in which truth is not the issue, or reflects a deeply engrained assumption in the very practice of argumentation is for another discussion.

The fact remains that we do argue, despite the inevitable costs of arguing, and that fact has special resonance when it comes to academic arguments and their minimal expected benefits and all those other peculiar features.

We are not disembodied, independent, isolated thinking substances. The mere fact that we are rational animals means that human rationality is embodied. That makes it possible for a variety of excluders to get in the way of arguments. And the fact that we are social animals means that our exercises in rationality take place in communities. That raises possibilities for an entirely different array of reasons not to argue. Our time, energy,

and intellectual resources are limited, so we cannot deliberate indefinitely on trivial matters. Our fellow interlocutors have interests of their own, so we cannot simply argue at will.

The catalysts that convert the rational imperative to know into the imperative to argue are *communities*, in a very broad sense of the word. Since personal relations and social contexts are also the primary source of reasons *not* to argue, the social networks within which we operate work both sides of the street when it comes to whether we should argue. Still, the source of our reasons to argue is our personal relations with others.

Some of our obligations to argue are immediate consequences of specific relations with others, as in the examples cited earlier about lawyers and their clients, political representatives and their constituents, and Abraham, Isaac, and Sarah. These are all obligations to argue on behalf of others. We also have obligations to argue on behalf of our own interests.

Of course, the outcomes of purely academic arguments, by definition, would not be in anyone's interest, but that does not mean there is no reason for such arguments. In addition to obligations to argue *on behalf of* someone or some interests, there are also obligations to argue *with*, to argue *for-or-against*, and to argue *about*. In their own ways, these other categories of obligations also arise from our membership in communities. The best context for understanding academic arguments is, not surprisingly, academic communities.

## 5. COGNITIVE COMMUNITIES

Academic communities fall under the more general rubric of cognitive communities. A community can be called "cognitive" for a number of reasons. It might be made up of individuals who are independent epistemic agents, the way that human societies, but not herds of cattle, are. Alternatively, the community itself might be a cognitive agent and the repository of group knowledge. There are, after all, things that we know that no one of us knows! Some group knowledge is reducible to, or can be accounted for in terms of, the knowledge of individuals, but not all. For reductionists, there is nothing mysterious in saying that we know how to put a man on the moon or that we know of over 350,000 species of beetles, even though no one person completely knows either of those. Reductionism goes a long way here, but there are still some unpaid promissory notes in the reductionists' account, like a choir's knowledge of how to produce harmonies and the various phenomena collected under the rubric of "swarm intelligence."

Neither of those senses of a cognitive community entails appreciable additional epistemic obligations on its members. Apart from the Peircean commandment, *Do not block the avenues of inquiry*, individuals in the first case are subject to epistemic imperatives primarily *as* individuals, not specifically as a members of a community of epistemic agents. Similarly for communities as agents in their own right: a community of epistemically virtuous individuals need not itself be a virtuous epistemic agent, and vice-versa. The imperative of reason to inquire applies categorically (or assertorically); the specific imperative to argue applies hypothetically, only insofar as it would be instrumentally effective in a specific situation.

The case of communities with a cognitive organization or *telos* is the relevant one. Research teams and exploration societies are examples. So are universities and academe at large. Argumentation enters the picture because it is the philosopher's stone that

turns hypotheses and speculation into systematic, justified theories. It is the backing that makes individual beliefs viable as public coin of the intellectual realm.

In a cognitive community, then, the default must be in favor of argumentation. In specific situations, of course, there might be excluders that take precedence, but the imperative of rationality is always present.

One possible excluder is worthy of special attention because of its peculiarity and how it embodies the complexity of the relations between individuals and the community: argument as a tool of inquiry can actually get in the way of inquiry. People who are too willing to initiate arguments, too tenacious as proponents in holding onto positions in the face of telling objections, or too willing to raise quibbling objections as opponents are not likely to have much success in their epistemic and cognitive endeavors. You do not want to get into an argument with them because disengaging can be so difficult. Knowing that your likely interlocutor is excessively argumentative is a good reason *not* to argue with him; but for some people, knowing that someone is an exceedingly *good* arguer could also be an excluder for arguing with her!

## 6. CONCLUSION

It is quite possible that a standing imperative to argue could actually be at odds with the imperative to inquire. However, while that might be the case for isolated individuals, the situation is quite different in communities specifically organized for cognitive ends. While over-eager, overly tenacious, and pedantic arguers can be annoying, personal difficult to deal with, and even morally offensive, they can still be invaluable members of, say, a research team. They can be spurs to others, useful sounding boards, part of a persistent vanguard into supposed dead end hypotheses, or a resolute rearguard defense against critical sniping. The qualities that make for an effective individual researcher are not necessarily the same qualities needed to be a vital member of an effective research team. Not every epistemic virtue needs to be instantiated in every member to the same degree. Even the excesses of argumentativeness, often an excluder, can be beneficial. (See Miller and Cohen 2008.)

From the perspective of academe, then, considered in its entirety as a cognitive community, the standing imperative to inquire, in its corollary form as the imperative to argue, together with the tolerance for argumentativeness, means that sufficient justification is indeed available for even the most esoteric of academic arguments. (Hallelujah!)

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# For the sake of argument: Commentary on “ACADEMIC ARGUMENTS” by Daniel Cohen

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Professor Dan Cohen asks us to think about academic argument, a strictly intellectual activity of engagement among professors. These exchanges remain little praised and even less understood by the worlds of commerce, politics, or the professions. Indeed, such ways of reasoning once characteristic of the Ivy Tower would appear to lack the *dignitas* and *gravitas* of the public forum, the court, or the pulpit, much less engaging the profit potential of the market. To say of an argument, “Its only academic,” is to claim a fallacy of sorts. “Only academic” is equivalent to characterizing an argument as brimming with minutiae, abstraction, distinctions without difference, definitions without place. To label an argument as academic is to say that it doesn't count for much in the real world.

There are other names for arguments that lack weight and do not warrant serious attention. Disputes are talked of as squabbles, quibbles, and scraps—unimportant in themselves but sometimes unsettling, even dangerous—tending to end in verbal fisticuffs, brouhahas, and sometimes actual violence. This broad genre of contention, dispute, and disagreement does not have agreement as its end, so much as it recognizes that occasionally interlocutors make argument for arguments sake. In the popular imagination, academic argument is a prime form of this activity type. Academic argument has a long genealogy, going back to Aristotle's eristic exchange where victory was the end of showing up an opponent, and Plato's *Symposium* where arguments about love were leveraged into an evening's activities of seduction.

Professor Cohen reminds us that there is virtue in all the overlooked, the neglected, the allegedly frivolous forms of reasoning. Given the meeting of our OSSA group of scholars, itself dedicated to honing the refinements of argumentation, I think that it is important to heed his spur to address the full range of argumentation. Academic argument, argument for argument's sake, appears as an enemy on the lips of every university administrator. Even the Social Science Research Council has come out with demands for relevance, impact, and engagement for academic disciplines. Everywhere thinkers are challenged to abandon theory and make an impact, to advocate for social change in each and every performance, and to teach students measurable skills—critical thinking being a veritable tool shed for testing the usefulness and strength of reasons and making them count. I will confess to my own turn to material culture and state of the art practices sometimes draws me away from the exercise of the sort of abstract thinking that keeps arguments circulating arguments as the life-blood of the *vita contempliva*.

The important turn posed by Professor Cohen is a reflexive one. Often an argument turns, not on the truth of a central claim, but on a discussion of the rules under which it is made, evaluated, disputed, or judged. These rules become controversial as social institutions, such as disciplines within the academy, set boundaries, protocols, condi-

tions, and conditions of legitimacy—all of which re-enforce taken-for-granted habits of reasoning. In this respect, these strategies of blocking are important for establishing and maintaining disciplinary organization and institutional authority. Such established boundaries, rules, and procedures encourage fields to dismiss the value of wider-thinking in the name of focus and intellectual rigor. Rigor mortis across the body of independent thinking may set in as a result, however. What is genuinely interesting may be obscured, if not buried, by the discipline itself. Economists failed to predict the last great recession and indeed economics itself may have contributed to formulating the instruments of the economies own undoing. Yet business schools appear to persist in the same questions, methods, and structures of rationalist thinking.

Professor Cohen asks us to make a turn, to value argument for arguments sake. This is a remarkable move. As argument scholars, we have always seen the glass as half empty. Fallacies show us that practices are incomplete, not entirely valid, and make-do. Fallacies exhibit ways of thinking that appear reasonable but have weak structures of inference. Cohen would have us think of the glass in a different way; indeed, even more than half full, but all argumentation as overflowing with meaning, matter and significance—if we but search the byways of argumentation that speak to human constraints and understanding. Let me amplify a few of his suggestions.

*Bad Arguments persist when reason appears to be abandoned or does not produce as it should be.* This premise may lead to appreciation of the conditions of a time and place where the release of deliberation thinking is difficult. Conditions of trauma and post war culture are instructive. Homer’s Telemachus section of the Odyssey has been regarded always as everything but a set of arguments, precisely because the reasoning is so bad; but, Homer brilliantly comes to terms with the very beginnings of deliberation in a way so clever it has been missed by 2000 years of exegesis.

*Missing Arguments* are those that could or should have been made, but were noticeably absent. These are interesting as well. The *Oxbow Incident* offers one such study in the failure of argument leading to tragedy, while lynching reminds us of injustice of arguments late or not at all. However, sometimes the missing argument speaks to the cultural formation of the human condition. In supporting the claim that Iraq possessed a nuclear threat, Collin Powell engaged in fallacious reasoning. However, from another angle the General performed the sacrifice of Abraham, the persona military father killing the persona of a political popular son by not questioning the sacrifice demanded of him by the Bush administration to tell half-truths and make up fabrications before the United Nations. Trained as a military man first, does he deserve simple condemnation?

*Misbegotten arguments* are those that take on notoriety because of their untimely quality, the failure to address what needs to be spoken to with transparent reasons. I recall Bill Clinton under deposition responded to a trapping attorney, famously, “that depends upon what the meaning of is, is”. The misbegotten becomes the object of humor, and Plautine humor by late night talk show hosts turned the phrase into a signature move of a misbehaving adolescent—saving Clinton from the Republican effort to kill the proverbial old man of the hoard. Misbegotten arguments sometimes have nice qualities for shifting the grounds of debate, as it turns out.

*Standing* is another issue to be thought of us as excluding argument. The complications take argument into the realm of identity. Who has the right to speak and be heard and in what capacity? Immigrants circle the globe. They are spoke about as labor,

as a “not us”, as workers and not as citizens. Visually, the victims of the latest housing bubble have disappeared—although more people world wide have been thrown out of homes than ever before. Maneuvers of standing affect the safety and security necessary to stand and speak constitute a biopolitics of argument that places material constraints on the visibility and voice of interlocutors.

Finally, the reflexive quality of argument works to block or exclude reasons, particularly in situations calling for *unity*. In debating the decision to invade Iraq, advocates treated opponents as favoring Saddam Hussein, which was far from the truth. Congressional advocates sought to cow opponents by asserting that Saddam Hussein may listening to every word of dissent and would benefit immensely from arguments against invasion. The substitution of others as imagined interlocutors generates argument as a third, within and against personal, professional and institutional partners. Unity is a reflexive move that blocks argument even as it opens imaginative spaces for support.

The relation between what are regarded as weak or unworthy arguments and strong and establish reason is a double one. If the meaning of weaker forms of argument, the attributed strength of authorized argument should be brought into question also. The social and cultural formation of blocks and limits to argumentation constitute an area of study as ripe as recovery of unremarked or criticized spaces of exchange. That we have not addressed the limits of disciplinary structures and recovered byways of reasoning suggests that we are still under Aristotle’s old definition of argumentation still. Arguments are made in support of premises. Argumentation is a technology of practice, like medicine, law, carpentry or other practical arts. A house has a form, materials, plans, workmanship, and a purpose. Bad plans, materials, work, or purpose, create a structure that will not stand. Yet, professor Cohen points us to another world where even unlikely forms of argument play important roles.

*The ass who cannot choose* because there is not sufficient evidence for the right or left alternative is a classic case. It goes back from its early modern version of a dilemma between balanced reasons to Protagoras dissoi-logoi, or truths in opposition. Absent external criteria upon which to make a decision, given that good reasons will likely appear in important decision, how do humans decide? In such case, rhetoric is action, enabling choice by swerving away from determination. No choice appears better than another, but choose we must. This view of argument in a modern world has Sartre-like underpinnings with ontology and was spoken about by Christopher Johnstone and Maurice Natanson (1965) as personal risk.

## CONCLUSION

The study of argument is well served by constructing ideal models of coming to agreement. However, it may be equally well-served by examining those by-ways of argument where something peculiar, special, different happens but is blocked from evaluation by social standards or disciplinary biases. Academic argument is particularly important to study. The cognitive communities that constitute a university conventionalize research in linear sequential fashion for the sciences and social sciences. Of course, administrators claim to cherish diversity, innovation, and interdisciplinary efforts. In the end, contemporary neo-liberal universities demand measured output, social impact, and disciplined study. The knowledge factory model does not maintain a genuine home for unconstrained

argumentation. Yet, the satisfaction of a mind to the truth—or that of a conscience to what is right, or human sensibility to what is beautiful—is at the heart of argument activities of the university. Absent such a commitment, the university forfeits its qualities as a distinctive place for practice, and so may lose its claim to be a special place of open inquiry. Absent the pursuit of argument for arguments sake the university in an age of new media becomes hard pressed to compete with aggregative discourse of online enthusiasts or with for-profit knowledge dispensing operations.

The satisfaction of open argument is not solipsistic individualism, however, because the pursuit of argument for arguments sake functions as rhetorical inquiry. In epideictic form, argument for the sake of argument poses counterfactual questions such as: Why is this premise considered given? What does not taking up this argument make us? What will not listening to this voice mean for our understanding? What does an unwillingness to look fully at these conditions render invisible? Rhetorical inquiry poses scenarios through examining worlds of argument in universes where one supposes conditions to be otherwise than given. The impulse to argue lies in invention, and invention in the pursuit of imagination asks who we are in light of what we may yet become. Only by recovering the inefficient, unbounded processes of critical thinking can the university come to terms with the uncertainties—the ever expanding domain of still unknowns—upon which its intellectual labor rests and argumentative work begins.

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