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The virtuous arguer: One person, four characters

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ABSTRACT: When evaluating the arguer instead of the argument, we soon find ourselves confronted with a puzzling situation: What seems to be a virtue in one argumentative situation could very well be called a vice in another. This talk will present the idea that there are in fact two roles an arguer has to master – and with them four sometimes very different sets of virtues.

KEYWORDS: adversarial ideal, cooperative ideal, practical wisdom, virtue

1 INTRODUCTION

Thinking about the virtues an arguer should possess, we might be tempted to just expect one simple list. Perhaps we imagine that it will contain such character-traits as fairness, intelligence, thoroughness etc. What we do not consider, however, is that an ideal arguer might have to possess virtues that at first sight look contrary to each other. In this paper, I will claim that exactly this is the case. I will argue that the Good that the virtuous arguer is fit to accomplish is the bettering of belief-systems and that there are two very different views on what behavior will accomplish this Good – the adversarial and the cooperative ideal of argumentation. Both views can present very good arguments for their approach and both have convincing reasons for the claim that the respective other is not appropriate or lacking in a significant way. Unfortunately, the virtues an arguer would have to possess to meet the requirements of one of the two approaches are contrary to the virtues he would have to have for the other. I will not choose between the two approaches, nor will I claim that one set of virtues is unnecessary or disadvantageous. Instead, I will claim that an arguer should possess both sets of virtue and use practical wisdom to decide which virtues should guide him in which argumentative situation. I will then propose and justify a criterion that can help an arguer in deciding whether he should be guided by cooperative or adversarial virtues: The amount of mutual understanding and appreciation of claims and arguments that has already been reached.

2 THE GOOD OF THE ARGUER

Opening a random introduction to virtue ethics, we will likely be confronted with a

story about knives.¹ Knives, we are told, have the purpose of cutting. As a virtue is a disposition which is regularly acted on and that allows its bearer to succeed at his/its purpose, and the purpose of a virtue-bearer is to reach his/her/its specific good. The specific good of a knife is cutting well. The virtue of a knife will be those attributes that allows it to cut well. A knife, therefore, should be sharp, sturdy, have a handle that allows a steady grip etc.

This story is supposed to explain to us what virtues are. Virtues are those dispositions that enable us to reach a certain Good. According to Aristotle, “[e]very art and every inquiry, every action and choice, seems to aim at some good; whence the good has rightly been defined as that at which all things aim.” (Aristotle, 1973, p. 1094a 1-3)

The Good of the knife was cutting well. That is rather easy to determine. What we are interested in, however, is the Good of the arguer. “Well”, we could say, “that is just as easy: The Good of the arguer is arguing well.” However, having said that, we immediately see ourselves confronted with an ocean of problems. An arguer could argue for all kinds of reasons, and depending on those reasons, he could have very different goals. The goal of an arguer in one situation might be to persuade another at any cost, and in another situation to find the best solution to a problem. To argue well could mean very different activities, not all of which we would think ethically preferable.

In order to escape this conundrum, we could reformulate our answer. We could say that the Good of an arguer is to further the Goods of argumentation. That promises a better outcome, for now we are able to ask ourselves a serious normative question: Why and when is argumentation a good thing? Aberdein, in his paper “Virtue in Argument” answered this question in terms of truth: Argumentation is supposed to spread true beliefs. (Aberdein, 2010, p. 173/174) For those of us that prefer to talk without reference to truth, we can weaken the claim a bit (and make it more vague): The good of argumentation is the bettering of belief systems.² This sounds reasonable: The activity of engaging in argumentation is praiseworthy because it leads to the improvement of belief-systems; those of the arguers, those of the audience, those of the opponents. Getting mere belief closer to knowledge, that is the good of argumentation, that is what we hope to achieve by arguing. I think that this is also the reason why argumentation theorists make such an effort to make rules or definitions that prevent deceptive techniques when pursuing persuasion. This effort is the most obvious indication that the improvement of belief-systems is actually the good of argumentation. As Raphaél

¹ Knives seem to be the favourite objects of virtue ethicists. For proof of this weird and perhaps a bit worrying preference type “virtue” and “knife” into google and you will get over 4 000 000 results. Examples of such introductions can be found in: Andre Comte-Sponville, *A small treatise on great virtues*, 2002, p.2; Douglas Soccio, *Archetypes of Wisdom*, 2012, p.38; Michael Winter, *Rethinking Virtue Ethics*, 2012, p. 14 and many others.

² A belief-system can be by including more true beliefs and weeding out false ones, but also in other ways – for example by establishing stronger justificatory connections between already endorsed beliefs or by weeding out wrong justificatory connections between nonetheless true endorsed beliefs etc.

Micheli points out, the most often mentioned goal of argumentation is to persuade or convince another. (Micheli, 2012, p.116, 117) But, he continues, we often argue even though we cannot see a reasonable chance to convince the other, or even though the other shares our position – then we might just try to justify or test our position. (Micheli, 2012, p. 119ff) In addition, the goal someone might have *while* arguing is not the same as the good or goal of argumentation as a whole: One is the good that the arguer expects for himself in one instance of argumentation, the other is what we expect from argumentation as a phenomenon altogether. When we talk normatively about argumentation, about how we should argue, we will talk about how we can regulate argumentation so that it will help us achieve this goal as reliably as possible. That is what argumentation theorists are trying to find out. This far, at least a fair number of us might be able to agree.³

How helpful is our result? Well, we can now formulate a rather vague definition of the virtuous arguer: *The virtuous arguer is the arguer who is disposed (and regularly acts on this disposition) to engage in argumentation in such a way that his contribution will, overall, further the improvement of the belief-systems of those that participate in the argumentation or get influenced by the arguments made in it in some other way.*

Having come this far, we immediately find ourselves confronted with a new problem: People do not at all agree on how an arguer should behave in order to accomplish this. A bit of research reveals that there are *at least* two very different positions on what form of behavior will render the best results in improving belief-systems. The first one promotes an arguer who engages in what has been labelled adversarial argumentation.⁴ The second one wants to see its arguers cooperative and helpful. Both present good arguments as to how their model-arguer will further the Good of argumentation. These arguments will be helpful in our inquiry.

3 TWO MODELS OF THE IDEAL ARGUMENTATION⁵

3.1 The adversarial ideal of argumentation

The argument for promoting adversarial argumentation is based on the idea of the survival of the fittest. We can reconstruct the thought as follows: In nature, all individuals are in a competition for resources. The fittest individuals are the most successful and therefore also the ones that will be able to transfer their genetic information into the next generation of individuals. Similarly, in adversarial

³ This short attempt at a justification of the claim that the Good of argumentation is the bettering of belief-systems is far from conclusive and in order to defend it properly, a whole different paper would probably be required. I think that Aberdeen made a rather good case for his truth-spreading-claim, and as this one is not so different from his I will just rest on his work here.

⁴ This name is used, for example, by Phillis Rooney, "Philosophy, Adversarial Argumentation and Embattled Reason", 2010

⁵ I will here present the two ideal in their most radical form in order to make contrasting and comparing easy. I am aware that most theorists who commit themselves to one of them will have a much more sophisticated, nuanced and often much less drastic view.

argumentation, all claims and arguments are in competition for the adherence of arguers, audiences and opponents. The strongest arguments and claims are most successful and therefore also the ones that will find the most acceptance from audiences and opponents and will be repeated on other occasions.

A number of us will probably know this idea from its use in critical rationalism. During the 20th century, critical rationalism adopted it for philosophy of science and epistemology. In reaction to the insight that it is impossible to sufficiently justify any claim with empirical content, critical rationalism turned away from this attempt.⁶ Instead of aiming at sufficient justification, critical rationalists suggested ongoing “critical examination” that exposes every claim to ongoing criticism by testing it with experiments or by “critical discussion” with the “help of rational argument.” (Albert, 1985 p. 46) Claims or theories that have survived the testing can be considered to be more reliable than those that have not been subjected to such examination. The idea that critical examination can be used to generate a selection of the best claims can be transferred to argumentation theory. Sylvia Burrow summarizes this as follows: “(...) the best way of evaluating claims objectively (...) is to subject those claims to the strongest or most extreme opposition.” (Burrow, 2010, p.238)⁷

However, because the principle is used in argumentation theory, and because arguments often are justification for claims, the principle of critical examination is not used to *replace* the principle of justification. Instead, the idea is to combine critical examination with justification: A claim is justified by arguments and critically examined with arguments against it. At the same time, the arguments too are being critically examined and justified. This way, the survival of the fittest is not restricted to claims, it also is supposed to apply to justifications (arguments).

In this setting, the ideal instance of argumentation consists of moves that attack or defend one or more claims. This ideal of argumentation is therefore widely called the *adversarial* ideal of argumentation. If it is achieved, then the result is supposed to be that bad arguments (like bad claims in critical rationalism) get refuted while good ones survive. Believing claims justified by such good (surviving) arguments leads to a better epistemic state than believing claims justified only by bad or untested arguments.⁸

⁶ That is impossible to justify a claim with empirical content sufficiently is shown in the “Muenchhausen Trilemma”. Hans Albert described the Muenchhausen Trilemma in his book “Treatise on Critical Reason”. As every premise in a justification has to be justified in turn (and as it is not possible to deduce statements with empirical content from analytical statements that would not need such justification), the attempt to sufficiently justify any claim with empirical content will end in 1) an infinite regress of justifications or 2) a logical circle, using as justification one of those statements that already proved to be in need for justification earlier or 3) a breaking-off of the process of justification that involves “an arbitrary suspension of the principle of sufficient justification” (Albert, 1985, p. 18).

⁷ There are other conceptions of the adversarial form of argumentation (that include rudeness, nit-picking etc.) I am here not talking about these conceptions – they have been rightly criticised and I see no easy way to generate virtues that would promote such forms of argumentation.

⁸ As was pointed out and criticised by Janice Moulton (Moulton, 1983), the adversarial ideal of argumentation, like critical rationalism, also included the idea that arguments should primarily be

3.2 *The cooperative ideal of argumentation*

The lack of cooperation is the adversarial ideal's greatest disadvantage and it has been widely criticised for this lack. The conviction of its critics is that knowledge cannot be furthered if new ideas get shot down as violently and fast as possible. One of the most sophisticated criticisms of the adversarial ideal was presented by Janice Moulton. She diagnoses that the idea of exposing arguments and ideas to the strongest opposition possible entails that they are also presented and written as addressing such opponents. (Moulton, 1983, p. 153) This can prevent such arguments from being adequately developed, or ideas from being presented with all their implications, because too much time is spent immunizing underdeveloped theories from counterexamples or criticism. (Ibid. p. 155) As the only aim of the adversary method is to show that the argument or claim of another is wrong and one's own is right, it is secondary to understand the possible merits of these arguments or ideas fully (Ibid. p. 160/161) or to work on making the other realize problems his ideas have (Ibid. p. 156) and to help developing the proposed arguments, claims and ideas further so that their problems might be solved in a constructive way (Ibid. p. 161/162). In addition, such an ideal might suppress attempts to integrate others arguments into one's own position, to understand criticism as helpful and to use other's thoughts as the stepping stones for one's own. At the very extreme, Daniel Cohen concern that the adversarial ideal might lead to the attitude to never be convinced by anything might come true. (Cohen, 1995, p. 182) All in all, we can say that the problem of the adversarial approach is that it represses a strive for understanding another's position, for developing a position in order to fully see its merits and for reasoning with the author of an argument instead of against him (this last formulation is taken from Cohen, 1995, p. 182).

For these reasons, one might endorse the cooperative ideal of argumentation instead of the adversarial one. It answers the evolutionary idea of adversarial argumentation by pointing out that it will not be possible to see the real strength of a claim or argument if it is being slaughtered before it reaches even near its full potential. Therefore, it asks arguers to develop the attitude of teachers and students and to learn from each other's perspectives and ideas, striving to nurture each claim and argument to its strongest possible form, correcting their weak points and furthering whatever helpful it is they can bring to the table. If this is achieved, then the result is supposed to be that the consideration of a multitude of fully developed arguments and claims will enable each arguer to gain the best possible belief system by integrating all those points that convince him.

However, we should not be fooled by the fact that the cooperative model of argumentation has developed as an answer to what was perceived as the dominating adversarial model. That it has risen out of criticisms of the adversarial model does not mean that it cannot be criticised itself. Proponents of the adversarial

deductive. However, this part of the adversarial ideal should – at least in argumentation theory – by now not play a big role anymore.

model could point out that the weak points of claims and arguments might not be found if the sole purpose of an arguer is to help develop each claim as fast as possible. Some things, they might say, are simply wrong, misguided or practically disadvantageous, and it is necessary that that is pointed out. Adopting the metaphor of the child, they could say that a child raised only with encouragement and praise but without correction will grow up to be just as worthless as one that has ever only experienced the harshness of the world.

We are therefore faced with two different ideals, each of which can present strong arguments in their favour and each of which can be legitimately criticised. If we think that both sets of arguments have their own worth – and I do think that – and if we therefore do not want to give up any of these two ideals completely – and I do not want that – then we are faced with a problem. And this situation gets worse, not better, when we ask ourselves which virtues these two ideals would promote for the arguer.

4 THE “CONFLICT PROBLEM” AND PRACTICAL WISDOM

4.1 Contrary Virtues

Let us think about the virtues the perfect adversarial arguer would have for a moment and then look at those we can imagine the cooperative arguer would need.

First we imagine the adversarial arguer in all her possible glory. She is a fighter, perhaps even a knight for her truth and she defends it with all honourable means. She will have similar virtues as the lawyer: Ambitious, self-confident, aggressive, determined, and thorough in preparing her own argument and in examining others for weaknesses. As her own argument’s defender, she will be loyal to her beliefs, only changing them when she finds herself defeated (she has to defend them against the attacks of others if they are to survive longer than their first mentioning) and critical with the objections of others (for they could be fallacious themselves). At the same time, she presents her arguments as clear and structured as possible, displaying their strength without the use of rhetorical means (as these might hinder a full sight of possible weaknesses – which would limit the effectiveness of the fight for survival). As the opponent of another, she is forceful in her criticism and thorough in her search for errors. At the same time, she disregards ornamental additions in the arguments of others (they are not part of the argumentative core). All this is necessary, for if the adversarial ideal is to work, every argument and claim needs as good a defender as it needs determined attackers.

Now we paint against that the picture of the cooperative arguer. He might be ambitious, but he is humble because he is aware of the possible weaknesses in his argument and helpful towards others in their arguments. When presenting his own arguments, he is imaginative in his use of language because his first goal is to make himself understood by others. At the same time, he will be prepared to easily change his own beliefs according to the insight of the arguments of others, even if they are not conclusive. When dealing with the arguments of others, he handles their claims and believes with care so that he will not endanger what might be of value in them.

He carefully considers every use of language in the arguments of others because it might help him to understand a new point of view. These character traits are necessary for the cooperative ideal to work, because the whole system can only further knowledge if everybody is determined to understand one another as well as possible.

The two arguers I have described are certainly extremes, and I do not claim to have given images of them that are right to the last detail, but it might have become obvious that the excellent adversarial arguer might not be the good cooperative one, and the other way around. While the adversarial arguer is her claim's lawyer and the prosecutor of the claim of others, the cooperative one is his claim's teacher. While the cooperative arguer sees himself as the constant student of other arguers, the adversarial understands herself to be a defender against them.

This leaves us in a peculiar situation. The first reaction to having two ideals, each of which has good arguments in favour of it and each of which seems to promote those advantages that the other ones lacks, should be to try and combine the two. However, that might be difficult: Imagine, for example, a situation in which an arguer find herself confronted with opposition to her argument. How should she react? According the adversarial ideal, she should search for weak points in the objections presented to her, trying to protect her claim and argument. According to the cooperative ideal, she should try and find a way to incorporate the criticism by changing her argument. Or think of the situation in which an arguer has to deal with another's argument. The adversarial ideal would tell him to search for this argument's weaknesses in order to test its stability. The cooperative ideal wants him to search for its strengths to promote them further.

It seems as if there will be many situations in which behaving according to the adversarial virtues will yield contrary results than behaving according to the cooperative virtues.

4.2 The "Conflict Problem" and Practical Wisdom

What we are dealing with is what virtue ethicists like to call the "conflict problem". (Hursthouse, 2003/2012, in: *Stanford Encyclopedia*) The conflict problem appears whenever two virtues seem to apply to the same situation and seem to require the actor to behave in very different ways. Fortunately, there is a standard answer to the conflict problem: To deny that such conflicts really ever appear, or better: To deny that such conflicts really ever are true conflicts. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy informs us that "a discriminating understanding of the virtues or rules in question, possessed only by those with practical wisdom, will perceive that, in this particular case, the virtues do not make opposing demands or that one rule outranks another, or has a certain exception clause built into it." (Hursthouse, 2003/2012 in: *Stanford Encyclopedia*) Of course, we have before us a multiplied conflict problem, with dilemmas lurking around every corner – because the adversarial and the cooperative ideal of argumentation imply such different ideas of how the ideal arguer looks like. Fortunately, the situation to which the adversarial and the cooperative virtues apply is also highly diverse and it can be argued that one instance of argumentation actually consists of a number of situations that are

different in many relevant ways. All we need then is practical wisdom, and we will be able to solve our problem. But – what is practical wisdom?

Practical wisdom, or prudence, is the virtue of decision making. According to Deverette's introduction to prudence and practical wisdom, the prudent person needs general insights into human nature, ends and means relations and what is usually good or helpful. (Devettere, 2002, p. 115) In addition, he also needs experience with a great number of exemplary situations, for prudence is "above all concerned with particulars – a particular person in a particular situation is making a particular decision about a particular action (...)" (Deverette, 2002, p. 116). According to this information, practical wisdom has a twofold nature – it is a combination of general insights into the type of situation working together with experience acquired in a number of particular instances of this type of situation. To illustrate this point, we can imagine someone using practical wisdom in order to decide what to eat: He has to employ his general knowledge of which meals are generally healthy etc. and then has to take into account all his experience of the digestive and other effects certain meals had on him in the past when he was in the state he is in now (perhaps he is tired, especially hungry etc.)

"Apply practical wisdom to find out which set of argumentative virtues to employ in which situations" therefore is a very vague answer to the problem we have found ourselves confronted with. However, we do not need to stop here. While it might be true that individual experience with many argumentative situations is indispensable when deciding which virtues to employ, there is also what Deverett called 'general insights'. In the last part of this paper I will propose that there is one such 'general insight' that might help to solve the 'conflict problem' of argumentative virtues by giving a few rough guidelines as to when cooperative, and when adversarial virtues are appropriate.

5 "DO WE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER?" OR: THE ROLES AN ARGUER SHOULD BE ABLE TO PLAY

5.1 When we do understand each other and when we do not understand each other

The general insight that I think is so important that it can give us guidelines as to when apply which set of virtues is that sometimes we understand each other – and sometimes we do not.

The adversarial ideal of argumentation seems to work best in a world where everybody understands the other clearly. In that world, the fact that it is an arguer's only goal to win arguments will mean that someone will come up with every possible argument for and against a claim and the claim then will be attacked with the best arguments against it and defended with the best arguments for it. If everybody always knows what another means by the things she says, how the argument works that she proposes and on what background of beliefs a claim is made that she puts forward, then every attack will be appropriate to the argument and claim presented. However, if misunderstandings and undiscovered meanings enter the picture, the survival of the fittest argument will easily turn into the survival of the fittest arguer: The adversarial ideal of argumentation is, as we will

see, especially vulnerable to problems that arise due to the possibility of not- or misunderstanding one another or even oneself. This does not only include problems that arise out of ambiguities of words, but also problems caused by different background assumptions and different reasoning patterns. The most famous of these problems is that of deep disagreements that Fogelin introduced into argumentation theory. To illustrate the situations problematic for the adversarial ideal, let us take a look at this kind of problem:

Normal cases of argumentation presuppose broadly shared beliefs and procedures of resolving disagreements. Participants of an argumentation must have a common belief system in respect to the topic of the argument at least to an extent that allows them to understand that an argument for a claim is could be convincing or why the respective other might find it convincing. (Fogelin, 1985, reprinted 2005, p. 6) If the participants of an argumentation do not share a belief system that extends that far, then disagreements can arise that cannot be solved by presenting reasons and criticisms. The belief systems the arguers take their reasons and criticisms from are so different, that one cannot acknowledge the others reasons and criticisms as such because he does not see how they contribute to the argumentation. (Fogelin, 1985, reprinted 2005, p. 8) The arguers do not talk to each other, they talk past each other, each of them feeling that the other is stupid, thick-headed or just does not get the point.

The ideal of adversarial argumentation by itself does not have any ways of dealing with such a problem because it does not acknowledge that such a problem might arise. It is designed for a world in which we, at all times, know exactly what we are proposing when we put forth a claim and what we mean when we presents an argument: The idea that belief systems will be bettered by submitting every claim and argument to the strongest possible opposition rests on the assumption that the argument faces this opposition in its best form and that the opposition is actually directed at the argument, not a weaker or misunderstood version of it. Unfortunately, to assume this is to assume falsely. That we understand each other is either lucky circumstance or the effect of deliberate work. It is therefore not only deep disagreements – rather drastic versions of misunderstandings – that pose problems for the adversarial ideal of argumentation. It is also simple misunderstandings, underdeveloped theories and different perspectives. If the arguers do not invest into understanding each other's points of view while being open to seeing the merits of another's argument, then such problems can mean that a discussion comes to an end prematurely or a theory is abandoned even though it could have been rescued.

The cooperative ideal of argumentation is built on the assumption that we do not, from the beginning, understand any argument or claim fully but that every argument or claim is worth the work of developing it to its best form and give it its most appealing presentation. If we construct it to its most extreme version, then it rests on the assumption that a claim or argument that seems wrong or invalid is simply misunderstood. This ideal therefore has its greatest merits when we do in fact misunderstand each other, deal with underdeveloped theories and arguments, or need to learn each other's system of background beliefs in order to be able to appreciate each other's positions.

However, sometimes we *do* understand one another – and at some point, even if we did not understand one another in the first place, understanding is either reached or we have to get by on what we have achieved. This is because the outcome of most – and certainly the most interesting – instances of argumentation have practical consequences. Therefore, at one point, a decision has to be reached – to do or not do something, to believe or not believe that some claim is true. Then the cooperative ideal of argumentation does not promise to deliver the best outcome anymore because it does not permit to just strike certain claims or arguments down. While such an attitude is very helpful in the infancy stages of a theory, it becomes dangerous later on in the process. When the stability of an argumentative construction or the acceptability of a claim can only be preserved by making ad hoc assumptions or accepting what is unlikely, strong criticism is sometimes needed to weed out what is not useful anymore. If we believe that certain beliefs are false, then we also have to believe that certain arguments are bad, and certain claims unacceptable. When we have developed arguments and claims to their full strength, then we have to test them by letting them compete with each other. The risk in getting rid of all adversarial tendencies in argumentation is getting nowhere – or nurturing theories, arguments and claims beyond their date of expiry.

We can now distinguish two different argumentative stages, each of which is best served by another argumentative ideal. The first one of the stages (first because it can be expected to occur more often in the beginning stages of a discussion or dialogue), is the stage of striving for understanding. It is characterized by the circumstance that the arguers do not yet understand each other enough to appreciate each other's positions. It is necessary for them to teach each other what they mean with the claims they put forward, how their arguments work and on what background assumptions they rest. Perhaps they still need to work on the way they present a justification that is not fully developed yet – or they want to change their claims so that it is better compatible with possible objections. The second stage is the stage in which sufficient understanding can be assumed. The positions have been developed far enough and presented eloquently enough for them to be fully, or at least adequately appreciated. The arguers understand each other's standpoints and perspectives and are aware of the way each of them uses language. Now they have to test the strength of their arguments and claims to reach a decision about what to accept.

Of course, in practice, these two stages do not occur one after the other, or can even be distinguished completely from one another. It will not be possible to record an instance of argumentation and then determine that from minute 1 to 5 the arguer were in cooperative stage, and then until the end of the discussion in adversarial stage. Each of these stages might have to be accessed at any point in the discussion to render the best results. Perhaps an arguer introduces a premise that no other arguer wants to accept but insists that they should. That is an indicator that the arguers should be cooperative for a while even if they have been arguing in an adversarial way up to this point. Or an arguer refuses to accept a conclusion that seems to be very strongly supported by everything he has accepted before. Whether a discussion is in the first or the second stage has to be evaluated by every arguer on his own at every moment of the instance of argumentation. That is the experience-

part of practical wisdom and it would be unwise to try and set up rules that will determine when a discussion is in which stage.

5.2 Four roles, two sets of virtues – one last word

All this means that a virtuous arguer needs to possess all the adversarial and the cooperative virtues – he has to be able to play the lawyer for his own claims and arguments and the attacker of the claims and arguments of others on the one hand, and on the other he has to be able to assume the role of the teacher of his own reasoning and the student of that of others. All these virtues are necessary for furthering the Good of argumentation because all of them serve this Good in their own way. Only one set of virtues would be deficient, because it would enable the arguer to handle only one possible argumentative situation well. However, just as problematic is the assumption that both sets of virtues have to be displayed at every point in time. It is psychologically – if not logically – almost impossible to be at the same time and in the same respect aggressive and helpful, loyal to one's claim and open for changing it. Instead, the arguer has to employ practical wisdom to decide whether the situation she is in calls for cooperative or adversarial behavior – whether she and her fellow arguers understand each other well enough to enter into competition, or whether this understanding has to be accomplished first.

According to Deverette, the most important virtue in Greek virtue ethics was practical wisdom. A person who has cultivated all the other virtues but lacks practical wisdom will still act wrongly. No one achieves eudemonia without a history of good decision making, and practical wisdom is the virtue of making decisions well. (Deverette, 2002, p. 84) As we have seen now, this is as true for argumentation and the goal of bettering belief-systems as it is for life and the goal of happiness. While cultivating all the adversarial and the cooperative virtues is important, the ability to determine the argumentative situation and to decide which virtues should guide the arguer's behavior is just as important. The arguer has to be able to play four different roles and to employ two sets of virtues – and he has to be able to choose wisely which one is appropriate at which point in time.

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