

# Virtuous Argumentation and Unendorsed Claims

**Andrew Aberdein**

*School of Arts and Communication  
Florida Institute of Technology  
150 West University Boulevard  
Melbourne, FL 32901-6975, U.S.A.  
aberdein@fit.edu*

**Abstract:** Should virtuous arguers' reason from premises they do not endorse? Can virtuous arguers reason to conclusions they do not endorse? Should competitive debate require participants to do either? This paper argues that, while bad faith argumentation is vicious, reasoning to or from claims that the arguer does not endorse can be undertaken virtuously. Indeed, when conducted with integrity, the capacity to trace the consequences of an opposing position is unavoidable in discharging the adversarial function of argumentation.

**Resume:** Les argumentateurs vertueux devraient-ils raisonner à partir de prémisses qu'ils n'approuvent pas ? Peuvent-ils raisonner vers des conclusions qu'ils n'approuvent pas ? Un débat compétitif devrait-il exiger des participants qu'ils fassent l'un ou l'autre ? Cet article soutient que, si l'argumentation de mauvaise foi est vicieuse, le raisonnement vers ou à partir d'affirmations que l'argumentateur n'approuve pas peut être entrepris vertueusement. En effet, lorsqu'elle est menée avec intégrité, la capacité à retracer les conséquences d'une position opposée est inévitable pour remplir la fonction d'affrontement de l'argumentation.

**Keywords:** devil's advocate, *ex concessis*, *ex hypothesi*, *in utramque partem*, integrity, unendorsed claims, vices of argumentation, virtues of argumentation.

## 1. Introduction

Should virtuous arguers reason from premises they do not endorse?  
Can virtuous arguers reason to conclusions they do not endorse?  
Should competitive debate require participants to do either?

There are several situations in which arguers reason from premises or to conclusions that they do not endorse: 1. Hypothetical reasoning, to establish a conditional statement or, in argument by contradiction, to reject a hypothesis. 2. Argument *ex concessis*, or

Lockean *ad hominem*, to derive a conclusion from the interlocutor's assumptions. 3. "Devil's advocacy" to give voice to an otherwise unrepresented standpoint. 4. Reasoning "*in utramque partem*", from both sides, in furtherance of Cicero's dictum that the ideal orator must be able to take either side of any issue.<sup>1</sup>

Situation (1) is unproblematic but narrow in scope; both situations (2) and (3) have been criticized as inconsistent with the highest standards of argumentation; but situation (4) has been a feature of rhetorical education since antiquity and is baked into the design of many varieties of competitive debate. Can this tension be resolved? Is there an account of argumentative virtue which preserves our intuitions about all four types of argument from unendorsed premises?

The next four sections discuss situations (1) through (4) in turn. The remaining sections bring in recent work in virtue theories of argumentation, arguing that this approach may help to address the questions raised above. Specifically, it is argued that, while bad faith argumentation is vicious, reasoning to or from claims that the arguer does not endorse can be undertaken virtuously. Indeed, when conducted with integrity, the capacity to sympathetically reconstruct an opposing position and trace its consequences is unavoidable in discharging the epistemically essential (but dialectically minimal) adversarial function of argumentation.

## 2. Ex hypothesi

One of the most familiar situations in which an arguer is expected to reason from an unendorsed premise is to establish a conditional statement or, in argument by contradiction, to reject a hypothesis.<sup>2</sup> Argument by contradiction, or *reductio ad absurdum*, has a long history as a legitimate move in deductive logic, even if it can ap-

---

<sup>1</sup> "[I]f ever a person shall arise who shall have abilities to deliver opinions on both sides of a question on all subjects ... to deliver two contradictory orations on every conceivable topic, or shall be able ... to dispute against every proposition that can be laid down, and shall unite with those powers rhetorical skill, and practice and exercise in speaking, he will be the true, the perfect, the only orator" (Cicero 1860, III.xxi).

<sup>2</sup> On whether these schemes should be considered distinct, see (Scherer, 1971).

pear counterintuitive. Catarina Dutilh Novaes distinguishes several difficulties that it presents (Dutilh Novaes 2016, p. 2616). First among these is that the initial step of a *reductio* argument is an assumption of something that is eventually shown (and perhaps already expected) to be false or impossible. One long standing remedy is to replace the assumption with a conditional that is known to be true ( $p \rightarrow p$  instead of  $p$ , for example) and continue the argument in terms of conditionals until, instead of deriving a contradiction, we derive a conditional with a consequent known to be false (say,  $p \rightarrow q$  where we know  $\neg q$ ), from which we can infer the falsehood of the antecedent ( $\neg p$ ) by *modus tollens*. Wilfrid Hodges has traced this strategy back to Avicenna (Hodges 2017, p. 584). Dutilh Novaes proposes an alternative means of dissolving the difficulty by understanding deduction dialectically, such that the “agent making the initial assumption is not the same agent who will lead it to absurdity, and then conclude its contradictory” (Dutilh Novaes 2016, p. 2624). Hence, if Agent 1 assumes  $p$  but rejects  $q$ , Agent 2 could show to Agent 1’s satisfaction that  $p \rightarrow q$ , without assuming anything false or impossible, thereby causing Agent 1 to withdraw assent to  $p$ . The proof need not have the surface form of a dialogue for this solution to apply, since Agent 2 may be “internalized” by Agent 1 (Dutilh Novaes 2016, p. 2620).

Conditional proof is also not without philosophical interest: Peter Murphy has argued that it serves to rebut the knowledge-from-knowledge principle, that inferential knowledge can only be derived from what is already known, since it can be a source of “inferential knowledge that is essentially inferred from a claim that is not believed” (Murphy 2013, p. 312). Conditional proof can also be understood dialectically, so that the unendorsed antecedent is attributed to the other party to the dialectic (again, perhaps internalized by the arguer). Crucially, however, both schemes meet the high standard of deductive validity (at least in classical logic). They can therefore be relied upon never to take us from true premisses to a false conclusion, even if the journey they do take us on makes some unexpected detours.

### 3. *Ex concessis*

Argument *ex concessis* is a pattern of argumentation noted in antiquity and termed *ad hominem* by Locke (Barth and Martens 1977, p. 79). Although, in modern usage, *ad hominem* is more closely associated with attacks on another arguer's character, it "originally meant to use the concessions of an interlocutor as a basis for drawing a conclusion, thus forcing the interlocutor either to accept the conclusion or to retract a concession or to challenge the inference" (Hitchcock 2007, p. 615). The imputation of fallacy only attaches to *ad hominem* in its modern usage; nonetheless, even in its *ex concessis* form, it can give rise to some concerns. As Gary Jason observes of such arguments, "If I try to convince you of C by citing P where you believe P, but I don't, I am being illogical. I am persuading you, not by sound argument, but by what I believe to be unsound argument" (Jason 1984, p. 185). We might address this concern with a move parallel to Avicenna's: if I accept that C follows from P, I can argue for "If P then C" by arguments that are sound by both of our standards; if you infer C from your (mistaken, by my lights) belief that P, that's on you. But, even though I have not argued unsoundly, I am still relying on your coming to believe C on the basis of (what I take to be) an unsound argument. Perhaps this falls short of the highest standards of argumentation.

### 4. *Advocatio diaboli*

The Roman Catholic Church has long adopted an adversarial procedure for the canonization of new saints: in addition to the promoter of a candidate for sainthood, there must be an opponent. The latter is a Vatican official tasked with "oppos[ing] by every lawful means any canonization attempts that were made", and popularly known as the Devil's Advocate (Farmer 1987, p. xxi). Beyond this context, *advocatio diaboli*, or devil's advocacy, has come to be understood as the ostensible support of an otherwise unrepresented position by an arguer who need not endorse the position. This has attracted scholarly attention as a possible remedy to groupthink in corporate decision making. In this context, the devil's advocate "assumes the role of an adverse and often carping critic ... [who] attempts to determine all that is wrong with the plan and to ex-

pound the reasons why the plan should *not* be adopted” (Mason 1969, p. B-407). Multiple empirical studies suggest that devil’s advocacy improves decision making (Schwenk 1990, p. 170). However, the work of Charlan Nemeth and colleagues indicates that an authentic dissenter is more effective in this regard than a role-playing devil’s advocate (Nemeth et al. 2001). This evidence for the value of authentic dissent is consistent with arguments for the value of ideological diversity (Whittington 2020; McBrayer 2024).

Amongst epistemologists and argumentation theorists, discussion of devil’s advocacy has lost its connection to empirical studies of group decision making, leading to more general definitions. For example, for Carrie Jenkins, devil’s advocacy refers to “cases in which a party to a *prima facie* dispute *D* does not believe the position he is (apparently) defending in *D*, but defends it (or at least pretends to) because he wants it to get a fair hearing” (Jenkins 2014, p. 23). Katharina Stevens and Daniel Cohen define the devil’s advocate as “a cooperative arguer who assumes the role of an opponent for the sake of the argument” (Stevens and Cohen 2021, p. 899). More generally still, for Giulia Terzian and María Inés Corbalán, devil’s advocacy is “an established means of manufacturing disagreement, ... typically announced or flagged by highly recognizable preambles” (Terzian and Corbalán 2024, p. 1313). Many of these authors also distinguish between positively and negatively valenced devil’s advocacy. For Scott Aikin and Caleb Clanton, the virtuous devil’s advocate “announce[s] that she will not be representing her own views, but that of some other person or group whom the arguer takes as wrong or ripe for criticism ... nevertheless tr[ying] to be true to those views in the discussion” (Aikin and Clanton 2010, p. 419). Stevens and Cohen propose the angelic devil’s advocate, “an arguer who embodies what is essential about adversariality without its objectionable or problematic aspects” (Stevens and Cohen 2021, p. 900). They are more pessimistic than Aikin and Clanton that such a paragon may be found in practical argumentation, suggesting instead that it should be seen as an ideal construct, in the manner of the universal audience or ideal interlocutor proposed by earlier theorists. Conversely, Terzian and Corbalán focus on diabolical devil’s advocates, for whom adopting the devil’s advocate role licenses “a putative plausible deniability de-

fence relative to the introduction of problematic content into the conversational record” (Terzian and Corbalán 2024, p. 1332). This is at odds with older conceptions according to which the devil’s advocate criticizes the prevailing plan “but offers no counterplan” (Schwenk 1990, p. 162). On the contrary, Terzian and Corbalán’s diabolical devil’s advocates are depicted as initiating arguments in order to offer their unwelcome views. Moreover, plausible deniability is something that is sought with respect to one’s actual intentions (Peet 2024). So, the diabolical devil’s advocate does not meet definitions of devil’s advocacy such as Jenkins’s that require the object of the advocacy to be something the advocate does not believe. That places them beyond the scope of the present paper, since they are not arguing for (or from) claims they do not endorse, but only pretending so to argue.

### **5. In utramque partem**

In support of the claim that the former British prime minister Boris Johnson is “notoriously uninterested in truth-telling” (Kenyon and Saul 2022, p. 165), Tim Kenyon and Jennifer Saul offer the following story:

He wrote one column in favour of Brexit and one column opposed, and then decided at the last minute which one to publish and which side to back. It is generally accepted that this decision was based entirely on what he thought would serve his career best. This is not the action of a person with true convictions, determined to argue for what he believes to be true. Nor, however, is it the action of a deceptive character, determined to conceal the truth and lead his readers into falsehood. Instead, it seems to be naturally characterised as the action of a bullshitter, someone who simply had no interest in truth or falsehood. All indications are that his focus was on nothing but political, or possibly personal, expediency (Kenyon and Saul 2022 p. 167).

Kenyon and Saul take Johnson’s having written two columns representing both sides of the Brexit debate before deciding which side he would back as strongly to his discredit. They suggest that this is the behaviour of an ambitious careerist, lacking any real convictions, uninterested in truth or falsehood, and motivated solely by

expediency. Quassim Cassam draws similar conclusions from the same anecdote, indicting Johnson of “epistemic insouciance: a casual lack of concern about the facts or an indifference to whether their political beliefs and statements have any basis in reality ... viewing the need to find evidence in support of one’s views as a mere inconvenience, as something that is not to be taken too seriously” (Cassam 2018, p. 2). Perhaps Johnson is guilty of all these things,<sup>3</sup> but in preparing two opposed columns he stood in an ancient, and widely praised rhetorical tradition—a tradition of which, as a man boastful of his classical education, he is likely to have been well aware.

Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* advises the student of rhetoric that “he should write out speeches of his own dealing either with the cases which he has actually heard pleaded or with others ... and should argue them from both sides, training himself with the real weapons of his warfare” (Butler 1922, 10.5.20). Quintilian’s inspiration, Cicero’s *De Oratore*, advocates a similar practice for the working advocate: “I conceive myself in three characters—my own, that of the adversary, and that of the judge. Whatever circumstance is such as to promise more support or assistance than obstruction, I resolve to speak upon it; wherever I find more harm than good, I set aside and totally reject that part entirely ... When I have acquired a thorough understanding of the business and the cause, it immediately becomes my consideration what ground there may be for doubt” (Cicero 1860, II.xxiv). Thomas Sloane, commenting on this passage, observes that “This continual practice of debating one side and then the other—in *contrarias partes*, or in

---

<sup>3</sup> Kenyon and Saul offer one other example of Johnson’s bullshitting: his apparent invention of “a ridiculously implausible story” that he enjoyed painting wooden wine boxes to resemble busses (Kenyon and Saul 2022 p. 168). This story is indeed highly implausible, and as Kenyon and Saul report, was widely received with incredulity. Nonetheless, truth can be stranger than fiction—eight years earlier, in a different interview, Johnson gave a strikingly similar answer:

I like to relax by painting on cheese boxes. You get Brie and Camembert in these lovely wooden boxes. Now it might sound cretinous – and I’m not a very good painter – but I enjoy it and find it therapeutic. I paint the whole thing white with a tube of children’s paint and I look for something to paint. The last thing I painted was a picture of one of my family in front of the Colosseum in Rome. I also like painting whisky bottles (Higginson 2011).

*utramque partem*—is a key to Ciceronian *inventio*. It is as old as the Sophists and is present in Aristotle” (Sloane 1989, p. 466).<sup>4</sup> Sloane traces some of its subsequent history, observing its revival in Renaissance rhetoric, visible not least in Shakespeare—Hamlet’s “to be or not to be” soliloquy is a clear example of the form. Locke, on the other hand, disparaged “the custom of arguing on any side, even against our persuasions”, since

It is not safe to play with error, and dress it up to ourselves or others in the shape of truth. The mind by degrees loses its natural relish of real solid truth, is reconciled insensibly to any thing that can but be dressed up into any faint appearance of it; and, if the fancy be allowed the place of judgment at first in sport, it afterwards comes by use to usurp it (Locke 1881, §33).

Locke’s complaint was revived in the mid-twentieth century by the communication professor and debate coach Richard Murphy, with a pair of articles sharply critical of the practice of requiring competitive debaters to address both sides (or an arbitrarily chosen side) of an issue.<sup>5</sup> Murphy argued that competitive debate should be seen as public speaking rather than a purely didactic exercise, on the principle that teaching is best when it most resembles the practice which the student seeks to learn. On this basis, he concludes that debaters should speak to their convictions:

If one conceives of debating as a closed club activity in which a rhetorical-dialectical exercise is used for some purpose, then perhaps the method can be judged in terms of pedagogy, rather than of ethics. But insofar as debating is public speaking, insofar as debating is a method of the platform, it will have to submit to the contemporary ethic, which is that a public utterance is a public commitment (Murphy 1957, p. 8 f.)

---

<sup>4</sup> For more detail on the Greek roots of this history, see (Tindale 2010, pp. 99 ff.).

<sup>5</sup> Murphy was joining a controversy initially provoked by the adoption of “Resolved: The United States should diplomatically recognize the People’s Republic of China” as a topic for an intercollegiate debate competition organized by the Speech Association of America. Several colleges declined to have their debate teams defend the proposition (Baird 1955; Greene and Hicks 2005; English et al. 2007).

Murphy's arguments provoked a slew of replies (including Cripe 1957; Dell 1958; Ehninger 1958; Shepard 1960; Sikkink 1962; Geiger 1965; Day 1966).<sup>6</sup> In his second contribution to the debate, while noting ruefully that the practice of debating both sides has only grown more prevalent in the intervening years, he sums up his differences with his critics as follows:

In this controversy, obviously the partisans work from different sets of values. One group believes debate to be an exercise in presenting arguments; the other group believes it should be an institution for exposing, clarifying, modifying, or intensifying belief and arriving at a judgment. One group holds debate to be an exercise in verbalization; the other maintains it is practical training in logical and persuasive speaking. One group describes debate as a school exercise, a part-skill, role-playing; the other sees debate as a real art applicable in life (Murphy 1963, p. 246).

Ironically, “an institution for exposing, clarifying, modifying, or intensifying belief and arriving at a judgment”, which Murphy intends as descriptive of his own position, might also work as a characterization of Ciceronian *inventio*. From this perspective, it is only by setting out the competing arguments as best as one is able, as perhaps Boris Johnson did with the case for and against Brexit, that one learns what one really thinks.

## 6. Virtuous adversariality

In recent years, one of the more productive approaches to argumentation theory has been virtue argumentation (for an overview and extensive bibliography, see Aberdein and Cohen 2024). Proponents of this approach maintain that some (perhaps all) of the traditional objects of inquiry in argumentation theory may be illuminated by reference to enduring dispositions of the arguers' characters, that is their virtues or vices. One such object of inquiry of immediate relevance to the questions posed in the present paper is the status of adversariality. We have seen that hypothetical argument is generally unproblematic, but the concerning features of the other three pat-

---

<sup>6</sup> Much later interventions into this debate include (Muir 1993; Harrigan 2008; Greene and Hicks 2005, 2010; Young 2011).

terns of argument considered above are only present (or only possible) when different arguers are committed to opposed, mutually exclusive positions. Arguing *ex concessis* presents no special difficulties if the concessions of my opponent from which I argue are things I myself endorse. At least on the definition adopted above, *advocatio diaboli* requires adopting a position one does not endorse to ensure that opposed positions are represented in an argument. Most explicitly, to argue *in utramque partem* requires one arguer to develop both sides of an argument, which clearly requires that the argument have more than one side. So, although none of this discussion should be understood as ruling out the possibility of purely cooperative modes of argument, the phenomenon with which this paper is concerned is confined to adversarial argumentation.

Adversariality marks a point of division between two of the more prolific advocates of the virtue approach (and the co-authors of the survey cited above): Daniel Cohen is a critic of what he calls the Dominant Adversarial Model (DAM) of argumentation (Cohen 2015); whereas I have expressed more sympathy for adversariality (Aberdein 2016). This apparent conflict is indirectly resolved in a later paper of Cohen's with Katharina Stevens. They distinguish four related aspects of adversariality in argumentation: "(1) the *adversarial attitude*, (2) the *adversarial stance*, (3) the *adversarial function*, and (4) the *persuasive-adversarial effect*" (Stevens and Cohen 2021, p. 900). An adversarial attitude is what distinguishes aggressive, uncooperative, zero-sum approaches to argument. This is the aspect of adversariality that is likely intended when the term is understood as pejorative. An adversarial stance, by contrast, has fewer negative connotations: this is the adoption of a role, such as proponent or opponent, required in some formally structured argumentation, such as in courtrooms, but also available in more informal arguments. An arguer taking an adversarial stance may also (be tempted to) adopt an adversarial attitude, but this is not mandatory, and may well be counterproductive. The adversarial function dilutes the scope of adversariality even further. This is what Scott Aikin has termed dialectically minimal adversariality, "the reasoned weighing of evidential considerations for and against a view"

(Aikin 2017, p. 16).<sup>7</sup> In this attenuated sense, adversariality may be seen as epistemically essential, since it is at least implicit as soon as contrasting positions are juxtaposed. More dilute still is the persuasive-adversarial effect: by giving reasons for some claim, I may persuade someone holding an opposed claim, even if I do not address it directly.

The adversarial attitude is irreconcilable with argumentative virtue, indeed habitual resort to such an attitude could be seen as an argumentative vice, but an adversarial stance might be adopted by virtuous arguers, at least in those types of dialogue where it is appropriate. Virtue theories of argumentation are not necessarily revisionary of argumentative practice, but a more audacious virtue theorist might argue that any types of dialogue in which an adversarial stance is required should be revised in favour of practices more consistent with argumentative virtue. But it would be far more revisionary, indeed perhaps impossible, to eliminate on such grounds any trace of the adversarial function, let alone the persuasive-adversarial effect. Hence there must be scope for a virtuous adversariality, at least in the exercise of the adversarial function, if not also the adoption of the adversarial stance.

## 7. Virtues of debate

When we reflect on the four patterns of argument considered above, and some of the distinctions drawn in discussing them, we can see them as falling into two groups, depending on whether the interlocutor is an idealized construct or an actual, non-ideal arguer. The former group comprises hypothetical arguments, such as *reductio*, which may be understood as dialogues with an “internalized” sceptical interlocutor (Dutilh Novaes 2016, p. 2620); the angelic devil’s advocate; and Ciceronian *inventio*. Each of these requires an intimate familiarity with the opposing view, but no outward defence of that view. The latter group comprises *ex concessis* arguments; the (merely) virtuous devil’s advocate; and practices such as switch-side debate, that require an arguer to defend a posi-

---

<sup>7</sup> Aikin sharpens Trudy Govier’s distinction between minimal and ancillary adversariality: the former is necessary for disagreement, whereas negative aspects such as hostility are confined to the latter (Govier 1999, p. 245).

tion other than from conviction. What are the virtues and vices appropriate to these two groups of practices? The patterns of argument in the former group avoid any apparent duplicity, making them easier to reconcile with argumentative virtue. On the other hand, since the interlocutor is not necessarily present, they require exceptional fidelity to the views such an interlocutor might hold. This suggests something akin to the first of what Daniel Dennett called Rapoport's Rules, after the game theorist Anatol Rapoport: "You should attempt to re-express your target's position so clearly, vividly, and fairly that your target says, 'Thanks, I wish I'd thought of putting it that way'" (Dennett 2013, p. 33). Arguably, some of these patterns, such as Ciceronian *inventio*, may be seen as furthering this outcome. That is the view of Michael Mendelson, who has written at length in defence of arguing both sides of the question. Indeed, he holds that "multivocality is a virtue (*arete*) in itself, an excellence to be pursued for its own sake" (Mendelson 2002, p. 118). It also acts in consort with other argumentative virtues, since "when I commit myself to understanding the views of others, I acknowledge their potential to displace my own present thinking. To enter into a dialogue of mutual respect is, therefore, to open one's self to the possibility not only that I could be wrong but also that I may have to change in response to a stronger case" (Mendelson 2002, p. 227). This "willingness to resist privilege and put each position at risk for the sake of learning more" in turn displays an ethical courage that places it "at the heart of our public and private efforts to grapple with the experience of controversy" (Mendelson 2002, p. 99). It also provides a direct link to virtue argumentation theory in its resemblance to Cohen's "willingness to listen to others and to modify [one's] own position" (Cohen 2005, p. 64).

What of the non-ideal cases in which arguers must outwardly argue for positions they do not hold? Immediately prior to discussing the virtuous devil's advocate, Aikin and Clanton propose a virtue of deliberative sincerity, "that when one asserts a position as one's own, it actually is *one's own* position; that one is not dissembling or bearing false witness for strictly strategic (and non-epistemic) purposes" (Aikin and Clanton 2010, p. 418). Perhaps unexpectedly, virtuous devil's advocates adhere to this virtue, since they are "*overtly* and *openly* uncooperative" (Aikin and Clanton

2010, p. 419). Conversely, Terzian and Corbalán's diabolical devil's advocates are insincere, since they really do hold the views they defend, but insist that they do not. Deliberative sincerity may be seen as a component of a larger virtue of integrity or good faith. This has been defended as one of the core virtues of "critical thinking in the strong sense" by one of the precursors of virtue argumentation theory, Richard Paul:

Intellectual Good Faith (Integrity): Recognition of the need to be true to one's own thinking; to be consistent in the intellectual standards one applies; to hold one's self to the same rigorous standards of evidence and proof to which one holds one's antagonists; to practice what one advocates for others; and to honestly admit discrepancies and inconsistencies in one's own thought and action (Paul 2000, p. 169).

Aikin and Clanton also note that the virtuous devil's advocate "will likely need to express the virtue of empathy" since "the effectiveness of this sort of dialectical strategy for argument development is dependent on the accurate knowledge of what exactly the other side believes, what reasons they proffer (or would proffer), and what inclinations they themselves have (or would have) in these discussions" (Aikin and Clanton 2010, p. 419).

The virtues of sincerity and integrity, reinforced by the virtues of courage and empathy, may also address the concerns raised about the other two examples of non-ideal argumentation from unendorsed premisses. The concern that we raised with respect to the *ex concessis*, that arguing validly from my interlocutor's false beliefs may convince him by arguments I take to be unsound, should be at least blunted if I make it clear to my interlocutor that this is what I am doing. Conversely, if I make no attempt to challenge his mistaken premiss, while I may have more luck in convincing him, I cannot be said to have argued with integrity. A similar response may be made to many of Richard Murphy's worries about switching sides in debate, which arise from the concern that a position advanced in competitive debate might be mistaken by the audience, or some other third party, for the speaker's true convictions. While debaters need not be expected to begin their speeches by denying any true sympathy with the views that they are about to present, the

basis on which positions have been assigned to speakers should always be made clear to the audience.

## **8. Conclusion**

We are now in a position to answer the questions with which this paper began. Virtuous arguers can indeed reason from premises or to conclusions they do not endorse—providing that they do so openly and do not seek to mislead the audience as to their true commitments. They must also be sure that whenever they represent a position they do not hold, they do so in a manner as faithful as possible to the views of the actual advocates of that position. Competitive debate should be structured so as to improve (and certainly not to diminish) the argumentative virtues of its participants. If there is a virtuous way to reason from premises or to conclusions one does not endorse, it is reasonable to expect competitive debaters to exemplify this aspect of argumentative virtue as much as any other.

## **Acknowledgements**

This paper was presented at the Second International Conference on Debate & Dialogue in May 2025. I am grateful to the organizers, Qatar Debate, for its inclusion in this special issue and their exemplary hospitality in Doha. I would also like to thank my respondent at that meeting, Rahmi Oruç, for his thoughtful and generous commentary.

**References**

- Aberdein, Andrew. 2016. Arguments with losers. *Florida Philosophical Review* 16(1): 1–11.
- Aberdein, Andrew and Daniel H. Cohen. 2024. Virtue theories of argument. *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines* 33(2): 117–142.
- Aikin, Scott F. 2017. Fallacy theory, the negativity problem, and minimal dialectical adversariality. *Cogency* 9(1): 7–19.
- Aikin, Scott F. and J. Caleb Clanton. 2010. Developing group-deliberative virtues. *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 27(4): 409–424.
- Baird, A. Craig. 1955. The college debater and the Red China issue. *Central States Speech Journal* 6(2): 5–7.
- Barth, Else M. and Jan L. Martens. 1977. Argumentum ad hominem: From chaos to formal dialectic. *Logique et Analyse* 20: 76–96.
- Butler, Harold Edgeworth. 1922. *The instituto oratoria of Quintilian*, vol. 4. London: William Heinemann.
- Cassam, Quassim. 2018. Epistemic insouciance. *Journal of Philosophical Research* 43(1): 1–20.
- Cicero, Marcus Tullius. 1860. *On oratory and orators*. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.
- Cohen, Daniel H. 2005. Arguments that backfire. In *The uses of argument*, eds. David Hitchcock and Daniel Farr, 58–65. Hamilton, ON: OSSA.
- Cohen, Daniel H. 2015. Missed opportunities in argument evaluation. In *Proceedings of ISSA 2014: Eighth conference of the international society for the study of argumentation*, eds. Bart J. Garssen, David Godden, Gordon Mitchell, and A. Francisca Snoeck Henkemans, 257–265. Amsterdam: Sic Sat.
- Cripe, Nicholas M. 1957. Debating both sides in tournaments is ethical. *The Speech Teacher* 6(3): 209–212.
- Day, Dennis G. 1966. The ethics of democratic debate. *Central States Speech Journal* 17(1): 5–14.
- Dell, George W. 1958. In defense of debating both sides. *The Speech Teacher* 7(1): 31–34.
- Dennett, Daniel C. 2013. *Intuition pumps and other tools for thinking*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.
- Dutilh Novaes, Catarina. 2016. Reductio ad absurdum from a dialogical perspective. *Philosophical Studies* 173(10): 2605–2628.
- Ehninger, Douglas. 1958. The debate about debating. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 44(2): 128–136.

- English, Eric, Stephen Llano, Gordon R. Mitchell, Catherine E. Morrison, John Rief, and Carly Woods. 2007. Debate as a weapon of mass destruction. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4(2): 221–225.
- Farmer, David Hugh. 1987. *The Oxford dictionary of saints*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, second ed.
- Geiger, Don. 1965. The humanistic direction of debate. *The Speech Teacher* 14(2): 101–106.
- Govier, Trudy. 1999. *The philosophy of argument*. Newport News, VA: Vale Press.
- Greene, Ronald Walter and Darrin Hicks. 2005. Lost convictions: Debating both sides and the ethical self-fashioning of liberal citizens. *Cultural Studies* 19(1): 100–126.
- Greene, Ronald Walter and Darrin Hicks. 2010. Conscientious objections: Debating both sides and the cultures of democracy. In *Selected essays of the sixteenth annual conference on argumentation*, 172–178. Washington, DC: National Communication Association.
- Harrigan, Casey. 2008. Against dogmatism: A continued defense of switch side debate. *Contemporary Argumentation and Debate* 29: 36–66.
- Higginson, John. 2011. Boris Johnson: I admire Scarlett Johansson and Marilyn Monroe. *Metro News*. URL accessed 31 December 2024: <<https://metro.co.uk/2011/05/16/boris-johnson-i-admire-scarlett-johansson-and-marilyn-monroe-12136/>>.
- Hitchcock, David. 2007. Why there is no argumentum ad hominem fallacy. In *Proceedings of the sixth conference of the international society for the study of argumentation*, eds. Frans H. Van Eemeren and Bart Garssen, vol. 1, 615–620. Amsterdam: Sic Sat.
- Hodges, Wilfrid. 2017. Ibn Sīnā on reductio ad absurdum. *The Review of Symbolic Logic* 10(3): 583–601.
- Jason, Gary James. 1984. Is there a case for ad hominem arguments? *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 62(2): 182–185.
- Jenkins, Carrie S. I. 2014. Merely verbal disputes. *Erkenntnis* 79(Suppl. 1): 11–30.
- Kenyon, Tim and Jennifer Saul. 2022. Bald-faced bullshit and authoritarian political speech: Making sense of Johnson and Trump. In *From lying to perjury: Linguistic and legal perspectives on lies and other falsehoods*, ed. Laurence R. Horn, 165–194. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Locke, John. 1881. *Conduct of the understanding*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Mason, Richard O. 1969. A dialectical approach to strategic planning. *Management Science* 15(8): B403–B414.

- McBrayer, Justin P. 2024. The epistemic benefits of ideological diversity. *Acta Analytica* 39(4): 611–626.
- Mendelson, Michael. 2002. *Many sides: A Protagorean approach to the theory, practice and pedagogy of argument*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Muir, Star A. 1993. A defense of the ethics of contemporary debate. *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 26(4): 277–295.
- Murphy, Peter. 2013. Another blow to knowledge from knowledge. *Logos & Episteme* 4(3): 311–317.
- Murphy, Richard. 1957. The ethics of debating both sides. *The Speech Teacher* 6(1): 1–9.
- Murphy, Richard. 1963. The ethics of debating both sides II. *The Speech Teacher* 12(3): 242–247.
- Nemeth, Charlan, Keith Brown, and John Rogers. 2001. Devil’s advocate versus authentic dissent: Stimulating quantity and quality. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 31(6): 707–720.
- Paul, Richard. 2000. Critical thinking, moral integrity and citizenship: Teaching for the intellectual virtues. In *Knowledge, belief and character: Readings in virtue epistemology*, ed. Guy Axtell, 163–175. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Peet, Andrew. 2024. The puzzle of plausible deniability. *Synthese* 203(5): Article no. 156.
- Scherer, Donald. 1971. The form of reductio ad absurdum. *Mind* 80: 247–252.
- Schwenk, Charles R. 1990. Effects of devil’s advocacy and dialectical inquiry on decision making: A meta-analysis. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 47(1): 161–176.
- Shepard, David W. 1960. Logical propositions and debate resolutions. *Central States Speech Journal* 11(3): 186–190.
- Sikkink, Donald. 1962. Evidence on the both sides debate controversy. *The Speech Teacher* 11(1): 51–54.
- Sloane, Thomas O. 1989. Reinventing *inventio*. *College English* 51(5): 461–473.
- Stevens, Katharina and Daniel H. Cohen. 2021. Angelic devil’s advocates and the forms of adversariality. *Topoi* 40(5): 899–912.
- Terzian, Giulia and María Inés Corbalán. 2024. Diabolical devil’s advocates and the weaponization of illocutionary force. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 74(4): 1311–1337.
- Tindale, Christopher W. 2010. *Reason’s dark champions: Constructive strategies of sophistic argument*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.

Whittington, Keith E. 2020. The value of ideological diversity among university faculty. *Social Philosophy and Policy* 37(2): 90–113.